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(Pityrosporum Ovale)

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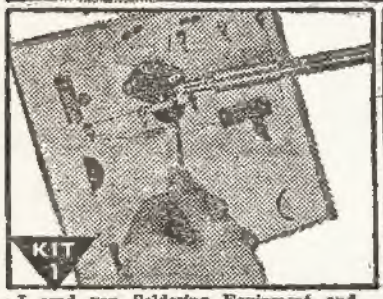

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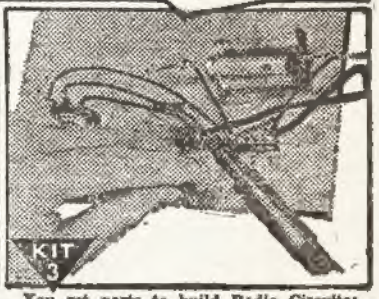

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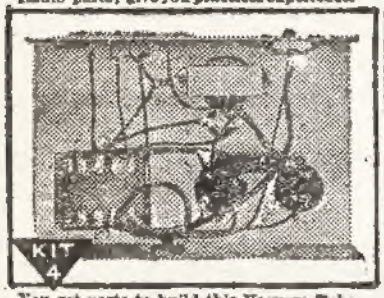

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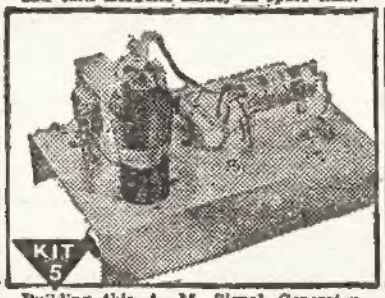

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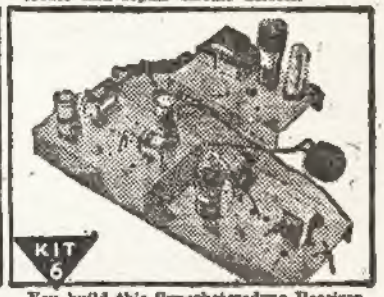

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Weird Tales

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the Author says. "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

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Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

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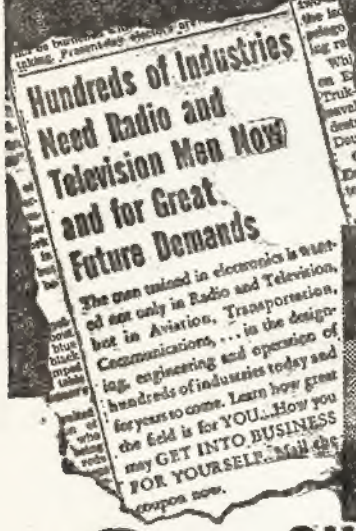

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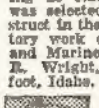

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Shonokin Town

THE face of Dr. Munford Smollett had once been round, but now it looked fallen in and haggard, like a badly baked pie, and one taut cheek was furrowed with scratches. His thick gray hair, probably never well groomed, hung in a tussock over his seamed forehead. When John Thunstone, at the door of his hotel suite, held out a great hand, Dr. Smollett seized and held it as though it were an anchorage in a reeling world.

"I came at once," he said hoarsely. "At once, as soon as I'd checked my bags at the station and crossed streets back and forth to make sure I wasn't followed. Sir, you won't believe what I am going to tell."

"I've believed many wonders in the past," Thunstone assured him, and drew

---

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

him through the door to a comfortable chair. "Please sit down. I judge that you need a drink."

"Thanks," said the doctor, and when Thunstone mixed the highball he drank in just such a greedy fashion as he would deplore in a patient. The glass shook in his hand, but color came back into his drawn face, and he spoke more clearly. "It was at a town called Araby. Do you know of it?"

"Start somewhere near the beginning," Thunstone bade him. "So far I know only what you phoned—your name and that you're in trouble."

"Trouble—and not natural trouble, not trouble from normal nature—"

"You're safe here. Near the beginning, doctor."

Dr. Smollett drank again. Thunstone refilled his glass, and mixed a drink for himself.

"I was taking a special holiday," said Dr. Smollett slowly. "I'd been working

---

A town of unfathomable evil, an unhealthy and unholy place. . . .

hard and prescribed a complete change for myself. I'd heard there wasn't much of a tourist rush upstate. Somewhere or other I'd learned of nice remote hideaways in the neighborhood of Zoar Valley."

"Zoar, yes," nodded Thunstone, remembering the tale of how once children were born there under a curse, with two-toed hoofs for feet and two-fingered crab-claws for hands. "You went there?"

"By train, cross-country bus and again by a little spur of railroad." Dr. Smollett's throat twitched. "I was being completely careless. Wanted to drop casually into the quietest spot. The timetable said Araby, and a ticket-man in a little station said it was a flagstop only. So I asked to be let off, and dropped at a little stone shanty of a station, with a bag in each hand. And the impossible part began."

"There are no impossibilities," said Thunstone, speaking like an oracle to hearten his visitor. "What happened?"

Thunstone, immense and vital, knew how to study assurance into the great dark rectangle of his face. His eyes were steady, bright, interested, his mouth firm without tenseness below the trim black mustache. It was acting, but it served the purpose. Dr. Smollett borrowed some degree of composure from his host, and went on calmly.

"Maybe I've imagined things later, the way you imagine things to add into simple dreams. Now that I think, I guess the first men I saw in Araby—should I call them Arabians?—didn't frighten or even perplex me. One thin old fellow was lounging on the shady side of the shanty-station. His clothes were somehow peculiar; cut and worn right, even nattily—but their material was new to me. Not any fabric I knew, maybe not fabric at all. It was like skin, and not dressed skin, either, but suggested living integument, white and sheeny. Here, Thunstone, I may be piecing out with imagination."

"Perhaps," nodded Thunstone, who thought otherwise. "You spoke to the old man? How did he look?"

"A grand specimen. I'm a doctor, I appreciate good quality of body. He was old, but not decrepit. His hair was gray, not as gray as mine, and thick as a horse's mane. Worn mane-fashion, too, square-cut behind and a big sweeping lock over the brow. Dark face, wrinkled, but not loosely. The body was thin and wiry strong. I held out my hand to introduce myself, and he took it—"

"Stop right there," commanded Thunstone. "How did his handclasp affect you? Don't worry about imagination. Tell me."

"It was as strong as a closing trap," said Dr. Smollett. "Dry and cool for the warm morning, yet no impression of ill health. Fingers long, tapering, hard as hard rubber—"

"Was there anything unusual about the fingers?

SMOLLETT paused and his throat worked again. "Yes. I sensed it then, and made sure later. The third finger, the ring finger, was excessively long. I never saw its like before, longer than the middle finger. How do you know about it?"

"Go on," urged Thunstone, without making reply to the question.

"I said my name was Dr. Smollett, and the old fellow dropped my hand as if it had scorched him. I was looking past him at the scene. The town was little and old and pretty—a well-mended place, if you know what I mean. The houses were mostly white, with low roofs like hats pulled well down, and they were grouped curiously, as if the streets weren't straight or crossed at right angles. The effect was like a modernistic stage set. Beyond rose the slope of a big hill, almost a mountain, and on it were trees, belt on belt of them, rich and green and with that upward-marching effect you get with a wooded incline. I said I liked the place. I asked where I might lodge for a few days.

"The old man shook his head. His gray mane stirred. He said, deeply and gently, that Araby had no accommodations for strangers."

Thunstone, watching the doctor closely, offered a cigar.

"Thanks." Smollett lighted a match. "Well, he was strange, but not unfriendly. I still wanted to stay. It struck me that the local medico might extend hospitality to a colleague, so I asked where a doctor lived. The old man jumped back from me, staring. I saw that his eyes—his eyes—"

"Had perpendicular pupils?" prompted Thunstone.

"How did you know? Thunstone, you have been in Araby!"

"Never. Go on."

"He stared. His lips twitched. He had pointed teeth. He said, 'No doctors here. We have no doctors in Araby.'"

"That intrigued me. 'Then,' I said, 'I might consider opening an office here. It looks like a pleasant little town.'

"He still glowered. 'Never have been doctors here,' he said. 'We heal things our own way. Don't want doctors.' And I thought he was going to spit at me, like an angry cat."

Smollett sighed and went on: "I figured him for a crank, and walked on past him with my luggage. I was looking for a place to pause, a store or tavern. Several men lounged together in front of a big square house. They all wore those white skin-stuff suits, they all seemed dark and spare and lithe, and they all were looking my way. I paused, gazing up and down, a little worried. Then the old man strode quickly past me. I wish I had energy like that—no, I don't. It wasn't human energy."

He was nervous again. Thunstone put a mighty hand on his shoulder. "I said you were safe here," he reminded. "I want the whole story."

"Things happened so fast they're hard to tell," said Dr. Smollett. "I may leave something out, or imagine something in. The old man spoke to the others—short words, in a language I don't know, and they jumped at me, fast and fierce as mad dogs.

"One hit me in the face, slapping and scratching." Dr. Smollett lifted his hand and touched the marks on his cheek. "He had long nails, and a long third finger. I felt disgusted and sick. I tried to back away, but they were all over me, grabbing at my arms and shoulders. They would have dragged me down, but I swung one of my heavy bags, with all my strength, at the head of the biggest. You should have seen him fall. Like a wet coat with nothing inside it. He lay still. The others all screamed and yelled and shrank back. I got myself and my bags into the little station-shanty, and slammed the heavy door shut. There was a big latch, and I put it into place.

"I thought quietly. There wouldn't be a train for hours, perhaps not until next day. I knew I hadn't any friend, or anyone willing to be a friend, in the whole town of Araby. I wondered if I could stand siege against these men who for no reason seemed anxious to kill me. They were talking outside, in undertones. Then one scratched outside the door, like a dog wanting to come in. It was the old man. He said there had been a mistake, and they wanted to apologize."

"You believed that?" demanded Thunstone sharply.

"I was only too glad to. I opened the door, and they swarmed all around me again. They grabbed me, and held me. One of them pointed to where something lay. The man I had hit. He said I was a murderer.

"I got my nerve together, and argued that I had struck in self-defense. Then the old man reminded me that I had said I was a doctor. He told me that I must treat the fellow I'd hit, and make him well. I was glad to do that, and I took one of my bags, the one with my medicines and instrument. I went to the side of the fallen man. None of them followed me. They seemed to strain away, in absolute horror."

"Of course, of course," muttered Thunstone, more to himself than to Smollett. "The one thing that—but don't let me interrupt."

"I knelt by the man. His face was a sort of dusky, bloodless, buckskin color now. Blood showed at his ears and nostrils, and his eyes were open, and one of those slit-shaped pupils was wider than the other. Skull fracture, I knew, and even before I touched him I felt that he was dead. I made sure in a few seconds. The metal fittings on my bag must have struck his temple and smashed it in. I turned around and said to the others, 'He's dead. Help me carry him to the station.'

"THEY all shrank away from me. They looked even more bloodless than their dead friend. I said, 'He can't just lie here. Help me,' and I stooped and got him into my arms somehow. He wasn't

small or light, but I managed alone. I carried him to the station, and inside, and laid him on a stone bench there. When I came back to the door, they had all retired to the houses, in a horrified knot. They stared at me, and whispered toward each other out of the sides of their mouths. When I came into the open, they scuttled clear away, and gazed at me from a distance, like frightened puppies.

"I'd had enough then. I took my cases and started to walk along the track. Two of them followed me far off, but once when I stopped and turned around, they stopped, too. They seemed set as if to fight or run, but they didn't move after me until I started along. We came through a narrow pass in the hills, and the railroad paralelled a highway. A truck came along, and I hurried to the highway and thumbed a ride.

"I talked to the truck driver. Told him almost everything except about the man's death. He said, 'Araby? Oh, those ducks.' He seemed to know that they were queer, and he seemed not to want to know anything else. The way people are about convict labor camps or insane asylums near their homes. He took me to where I could catch my bus, and from the bus I caught a train to New York. On the train were two of those Araby men, in their strange suits, with their intent faces peering after me. They'd followed. I sat in a crowded smoking car all night. I got here, telephoned you, and I hope I shook them off my trail when I came here. Mr. Thunstone, people say you know more than almost anyone else about the strangest things of life. What is Araby, and what are its citizens?"

"Do you remember hearing anything about the Shonokins?" asked Thunstone in turn.

"Shonokins? Shonokins? Oh, the legend—"

"Don't you know now that they aren't a legend? That's a Shonokin community. I've barely heard of it, and you've done me a favor by telling me about it."

"But Shonokins are a nature myth, an Indian story like Hiawatha."

"Hiawatha was a real man, and the Shonokins are real—real almost-men. I've seen several. I've examined them. What you tell matches what I know about them. Those long third fingers, those strange clothes. Their peculiar knowledges and sciences, that make them distrust our medicine and other skills. And they fear only their own dead. Because, so far as I can learn, nobody ever saw a Shonokin die except accidentally or violently."

"How does science explain that?" demanded Dr. Smollett.

"Science doesn't recognize the existence of Shonokins, let alone try to explain them. Would science take seriously the report of a race that had no females as far as anyone knows?"

"I didn't see any women, at that," mused Smollett.

"Creatures with eyes and hands like that? Creatures that, for all they look like human beings, aren't human beings? Aren't descended from the same original beasts as ourselves, but were a different stock, branching off in ages we cannot define? Who say that they've lain in hiding enough centuries, and want to start quietly and deliberately to possess the world they insist was always theirs?"

"How do you know that's their way?" asked Smollett. "Or do you really know, are you doing more than guessing?"

"I know some things, and guess others. Dr. Smollett, I want your promise of silence for the time being. You need rest now, and pleasant companions, and safety. I want you to spend two or three days as the guest of some friends of mine."

They went in a taxi to the home of a man who came to the door in a robe like that of a priest, but dark green instead of black. He greeted Thunstone as one brother will greet another with whom he is on excellent terms. He was eager, but not surprised, when Thunstone introduced Dr. Smollett and asked if he might stay. The three had dinner, drinks and considerable pleasant talk. Thunstone went away, alone, to the office of a railroad executive. He introduced himself by mentioning the name of a man known and admired by both himself and the railroader.

"The favor I want," said Thunstone, "is to ride on a little spur line your railroad operates in the Zoar Valley region. I'm going up there tonight by airplane. I want to approach Araby, but not to stop there.

Let your train slow down at a point I'll designate, so that I can drop off just outside the town."

THEY granted Thunstone's request of course. He never makes requests without reason, and without knowing those requests will be granted. He flew to the Zoar Valley country without hand luggage, though his pockets were stuffed with various things, and was in plenty of time for the train that left a small division point in the evening to travel the spur toward Araby.

It was a mixed train, with an ancient passenger coach, a milk car, two freight cars and a caboose. The wise-looking old conductor had on his sleeve four gold stripes for twenty years of service. He shook hands with Thunstone and sat beside him in the passenger coach, talking. Thunstone asked him no questions, but what the conductor told him might have been a series of helpful answers.

"Araby's an old town. I never get off there, never have. Somebody has a deal with the line to act as station master, though it's only a flagstop. Sometimes they take off freight, though they never put any on. Once in months, one or two of them will get on or off. Peculiar, yes, but the world's full of peculiar people. Never pass the time of day. Pay their passage in money, not tickets. Mostly in old coins, dollars and half dollars; once in a while in bills. The bills look new. I was worried a couple of times and had a bank check the bills for counterfeit. They were good, though."

"Naturally," said Thunstone.

"Unnaturally," rejoined the old conductor. "Araby's an unnatural place. Nobody goes there. Maybe the sheriff would, but there's never any trouble to call him. No telegraph, no phone, no newspaper I ever heard of. They have a deal with the government, too, like the deals Indian tribes have, to be let alone. Don't know how they worked it. They aren't Indians."

"No, they aren't," agreed Thunstone.

The conductor squinted through his spectacles at the scenery going past. It was after sundown, and to Thunstone the night looked black; but, like all railroaders on familiar routes, the conductor knew where he was.

"We'll be there in five minutes," he said. "Usually we highball through, but we'll take it at about thirty miles an hour. Two miles past, there's a little cut-through, full of trees. We slow to about fifteen there, and out you can go. Good-bye, Mister. You know what you're doing."

"I know," Thunstone assured him.

The conductor got up. Thunstone followed him up the aisle and paused in the entry of the car. He watched as the train rolled to the edge of Araby and through. There were houses against a night-gloomy slope, as Dr. Smollett had described. They had lights, very few and dim and reddish, as if shining through colored glass. Thunstone walked down the steps of the car, his huge hand on the cleat at one side. The train cleared Araby and cut its speed. It came to a curve, plunged in between close heights. That would be the cut-through. Thunstone poised himself on the bottom step, waited for his instinct to speak, and sprang into the darkness.

For all his size and weight, he landed lightly on his feet, like a cat. Quickly he knelt on mossy ground among bushes, and waited for the train to gather speed and vanish with its lights that might disclose him. Then he flexed his muscles to rise, but at once he crouched lower. The ground under his knee gave a tiny vibration—something was coming, cautiously and slowly.

Thunstone waited motionlessly. A bush rustled. His eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness of the cut-through, made out a moving silhouette, upright and smaller than himself. It was pausing, then moving ahead, its head turning this way and that as if peering in the night. Not five yards from Thunstone the figure stopped. He heard it clear its throat, and then a match flared to light a cigarette.

HE SAW a hatless head of brown hair, an aggressive young face, an open-collared blue shirt with sleeves rolled almost to the shoulders over arms that were sinewy but not bulky. This was no Shonokin.

Thunstone crept forward at a crouch, then pounced with massive speed. His two mighty hands fell on the youngster's biceps

and closed like manacles, holding his captive helpless.

Match and cigarette fell and went out. Towering above the young man, Thunstone spoke quickly.

"Don't move, or I'll pull your arms out at the shoulders. Where did you come from, and who are you?"

In the dark sounded a little chuckle, from nervousness or ordinary good humor. A gentle young voice made reply:

"I dropped off that train, just like you. And my name's Kent Collins. You can call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone."

"Crash?"

"A nickname I got when I played football. You'll find it tattooed on my left arm. I came because I wanted to help you."

The youth who called himself Kent Collins was well grown—perhaps five feet ten inches tall, and all of a hundred and sixty-five pounds in weight—but plainly he realized that he would have no chance against the giant Thunstone. He did not move in Thunstone's grip, did not even tense his imprisoned biceps. "I was hoping," he said, "that you'd see my match light and come over. I don't blame you for not trusting me."

"Lighting a match hereabouts is foolish," Thunstone told him sententiously. "And why should I trust you?"

"You shouldn't until I prove myself. I'll try that. I know a little about you, and a little less about why you're here. But I do know something about both. I'm a friend of Dr. Smollett."

"So you say," said Thunstone.

"Several of his friends knew how tired he was, and were a little afraid he might collapse. When he went on that vacation, I agreed with some of the others to go along—not where he'd see, but in sight of him if he needed help."

"Didn't you think he needed help in Araby, Collins?"

"Call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone. I dozed through Araby, and when I woke up he was gone and the train pulling away. I jumped off at just about this point, and headed back toward town. I was in time to see him in trouble—out of it again—and running."

"What did you do?"

"Shivered." Crash Collins suited action to word. "So would you, Mr. Thunstone—no, they say you never shiver. They say you'd look the devil himself in the eye and call him a liar. But I shivered. I crouched down in some bushes by the track, until another train came along. I saw two of the Shonokins flag it down and get on. I made a run and caught the rear rail. They didn't pay attention to me, they were busy whispering together. I got off and followed them when they made a change to a New York train. Dr. Smollett was on that train, and they watched him so closely that they didn't notice me. He shook them off his trail and came to you, and I was right behind him. I heard everything the two of you said, at your hotel and later at—"

"You heard?" repeated Thunstone.

"There's a fire escape outside your window, Mr. Thunstone."

Thunstone relaxed his grip. "I heard a noise there, but I ignored it."

"Should you have ignored it?" inquired the gentle voice.

"I could afford to. The room where I live has—various devices." Thunstone decided not to enter into descriptions. "They would warn me of any danger or spying close at hand by supernatural enemies."

"Like the Shonokins," suggested Crash Collins.

"Exactly. What you tell me is enough to show that you're not in with them, at least. You may be honest about the rest of it, and you may not. But you're a normal human being, and no more than that."

"You make me sound run-of-the-mill," sighed Crash Collins. "I really want to help you. I haven't anything else to do in life. No family, no job of any importance—"

"My advice to you is to get out of here," Thunstone cut him off. "Head up the track and away from Araby. Now and then men find themselves idle and bored, and mix into adventures like this. They're a thousand times more in peril than the business man who fired ten shots at a mark and goes into the African wilds to hunt man-eating lions."

"Please," begged Crash Collins. "I'll do anything you say—"

"What I say is for you to get away from here," Thunstone interrupted again. "I

need all my eyes and thoughts for the Shonokins, without protecting you. If you're honest in wanting to help, I'm honest in telling you that you may be more trouble than good. Sorry, I can't be more polite than that. Leave me alone."

Crash Collins shrugged and turned away. Thunstone moved in the direction of the Shonokin town.

THERE was noise from the town, not loud or definite. Perhaps he would not have heard it so far off if he had not expected to hear it.

It was not singing, though instruments of some sort played, and voices sounded in rhythm. They chanted and kept time, without musical tones. Thunstone had heard performances like that, once or twice, in concerts peculiarly planned and sponsored, that claimed to forecast the music of the future. His musical education was as good as the next layman's, but he had always felt baffled, repelled and in some sort dismayed. Now he wondered if the concerts were given by persons who knew something about Shonokin pseudo-music.

He thrust his hands into one pair of pockets, then another, to check the things he had brought along. Two talismans in particular he made sure of—a round gold case smaller than a coin, in which was sealed something said to be the eye of a bat, pierced and embalmed. The other was a dark leather thumb stall, which he now produced and slid upon his huge right thumb. It had been made, the giver had told him, from the ear of a black cat that had been boiled in the milk of a black cow and otherwise treated. Both talismans were credited with the power to make their bearer invisible. Thunstone did not wholly accept this claim, at least he did not think it could be done without the recital of words and the making of gestures he did not not care to try; but they could and would baffle counter-charms that might betray his whereabouts and motives to watchers in Araby.

The street he came to was as smooth and level as a dance floor, but not slippery. The Shonokins had strange materials and tools, for paving and other things. To one side grew a sort of hedge, of tall tufted reeds, and Thunstone hugged it, stealing quietly along. He came to a point opposite one of the houses with reddish lights inside, and paused, but could see nothing through the clouded panes. He moved on toward another, then dropped to his knee. He parted his lips to relax pressure on his ear-drums, listening.

Movement. There was a rush of movement behind him. He swivelled around, still kneeling, and drove a hand under his coat for one of several weapons he had chosen as probably effective against such enemies. But they were not coming toward him. They swirled and struggled in a group yards away on his back track. He saw their pallid garments, their flourishing arms.

"Take that, you damned—"

There was a dull *chock* of a blow, and the voice stopped. But the four words were enough for Thunstone, and the voice. It was Crash Collins, who had brushed aside his warning and had followed. Knowing nothing of Shonokin methods, he had been detected and attacked.

Even now it was too late for Thunstone to charge to his rescue. Thunstone slipped silently through the hedge, and peered between stems. They came along the street, padding quietly like two-legged leopards, five or six of them. In their midst they hustled the staggering, half-stunned figure of Crash Collins. Moving past Thunstone, they walked toward the thicker jumble of houses just beyond. Voices called to them, in the language that Dr. Smollett had been unable to identify, and that Thunstone could identify but not understand.

They had captured the young man, kept him alive. Why?

HE CAME from his hiding and moved quietly in the wake of the group, keeping their pale garments barely in sight. He himself was dressed in dark clothes, could hardly be seen, even by the feline eyes of the Shonokins. Up ahead he heard voices, questioning and answering, as though some sort of a guard challenged the group. Then more Shonokins were joining. They chattered together, all at once and briefly. Falling silent, they turned at a corner and he hurried after them in time to see them toiling up-hill.

He followed again, thankful that this path or trail led away from the houses. The Shonokins, up ahead, were marching their prisoner toward the top of the slope. The way was longish and more than a little steep, so that Thunstone found himself on all fours more than once. But the creatures he followed were sure and quick in the dark and on the slope, and he had to exert himself to keep them in sight.

So hard did he work to climb that he did not watch well enough. A pale-clad figure appeared almost immediately above him, its foot within touch of his hand. It spoke to him, a question in the Shonokin language.

Thunstone, crouching to climb, shot out his hand and grasped an ankle that writhed as if boneless in his grip. The Shonokin might have opened its mouth to cry, but he was too quick and grim. A mighty heave upward, and its feet came out from under it and its head struck dully on the hard paving of the trail. A moment later Thunstone's weight was upon it, and his hands were at its neck. He felt the cords of that neck crawl and writhe under his fingers, like a handful of captive snakes, and hands flashed upward to flesh sharp nails in his cheeks. He did not flinch nor move his head, except to writhe it clear of a groping of those ill-assorted fingers toward his eyes. Into his own hands and forearms he poured his muscular strength, deliberately and knowledgably. He felt his thumbs sink into the relaxing flesh, as into putty, and the struggles beneath him weakened. The claws slipped down from his face and dabbled ineffectually at his wrists, scraping the skin but not fastening. The Shonokin went slack under him, but it might be a trick. Thunstone clung to his throttle-hold while he counted under his breath, very slowly, up to forty.

Then he let go and rose upward and backward, fumbling for a handkerchief to mop his bleeding face. He listened and peered. The Shonokin made no move and no sound, did not even breathe. He knelt again and fumbled for where its heart might be, then for its pulse. There was no hint of life.

John Thunstone, who had never rejoiced to kill or injure any of the men he had been forced to fight, smiled to himself in the dark. It was a hard smile, that would have frightened many excellent men and women who thought of John Thunstone as an oversized but gentle scholar. He dragged the body a little down-hill and stretched it full across the trail. No Shonokin would follow him up past the dead carcass of one of its own race. And plainly this one had lingered as a sentry, he could advance without too great fear of rearward watchers above.

He continued his upward climb.

THERE was light above, pallid rather than the sort of strange red glow that had showed at the windows in the town. Thunstone left the trail to move cautiously in bush-clumps. He came close, as close as he dared, and pulled aside some leafy twigs for a look at what might be on the brow of the slope.

The glow showed him a building, at first glance like a castle, at second like those battlemented structures which set off the dam of a reservoir. It was square, with a tower at each corner, and each tower topped with a pointed roof like a nightcap. There were no windows, only a single arched doorway closed with a massive portal that seemed to have neither lock nor latch. From inside, as through an open space where the main roof should be, rose the pallid light, enough to show him everything. Over the building fluttered dark winged creatures—big bats, judged Thunstone.

Close to him, and all facing toward the door of the castle-like structure, were grouped the Shonokins. Among their pale-clad figures, lithe and triumphant, stood the darker, taller figure of Crash Collins. He was bound around the arms with something like a strip of pale, flexible metal.

One of the gathering, gray and consequential, spoke in a deep and authoritative voice.

One of the Shonokins near Collins addressed him:

"He asks your name."

"Kent Collins," was the steady reply. "This is war, I guess, and I'm your prisoner. Conventions of war allow you to ask my name, and say that I can answer."

"And what are you doing here?"

Collins laughed a single syllable. "Con-

ventions of war don't oblige me to answer that. Keep it fair, Shonokin."

The interpreter spoke to his companions in their own language, and they chorused a soft, snarling noise that might have been laughter. The gray Shonokin spoke again, and the interpreter addressed Collins as before:

"He wonders if you are satisfied with what has happened to you."

"Nothing's happened to me yet that I can't stand," replied Collins. "I'm wondering at a lot of things, but I'm not hurt or scared yet."

The boy was a magnificent liar, Thunstone told himself. If Crash Collins was not frightened, then he was a bigger fool than Thunstone took him for. The interpreter translated into Shonokin, listened to yet another query from the gray chief, and turned back to Collins with a new question.

"He asks if you have any prayers to offer to the god you worship."

"Not here and now," replied Collins at once. "I've always thought I should pray more; but since I haven't, it's a poor time to begin when I'm in trouble. Nobody who listens to prayers is going to respect me if I do. And any help I deserve will come my way, pray or not."

"A sophistication," said the interpreter. "You may become less glib as time goes on, Collins. But if you decline to pray in your manner, you will let us pray in ours."

"If I don't have to enter into it."

"But you do have to enter into it, Collins. We'll show you how and when. But watch. It will be the last experience of your life."

DESPITE his own danger, and his apprehension for the youngster who had blundered into the hands of the creatures, Thunstone was fascinated. Worship—the Shonokin had said they would pray to their deity. Thunstone turned over in his mind the suggestion, made to him once by a professor of psychology, that religion was an instinct as deep as any, and not confined to humanity. The vanished race of the Stone Age, the Neanderthal folk that—like the Shonokins—stood erect, used fire and tools and language, but were—like the Shonokins—another breed than man, had worshipped. Scholars knew that, for they found the ill-shapen bones of Neanderthalers in graves, and beside them their weapons and possessions, laid there for use in an after-life. Someone not a psychologist had offered the fancy that the god of the Neanderthalers was the being men knew at Satan. . . . However that might be, dogs worship their masters as gods, wild things fear men as devils. Did not the ancient writers about animals credit them with devotion—in the Arabian Nights the beasts swore by Allah, and there were the old stories from Africa about ape-peoples who served at abominable altars. Thunstone himself had visited the cave in Southern France that was maintained as a chapel, because inside it an ox had been found on his four knees before a natural marking in the shape of a cross.

The Shonokins, who are not human, were going to pray.

Collins, bound as he was, did not move or speak until two of his captors led him to a rock and shoved him down to sit upon it. Then he spoke, and in deadly insult. One of the group laughed back, unpleasantly and felinely. Around the gray chief several Shonokins were grouped, helping him into a costume. It included a scarf and what appeared to be an ancient, shabby opera hat. In his hand the chief took a staff, that was adorned at the end with a carven skull from the pate of which sprouted sparse hair, like faded grass. His costuming done, the creature looked like a coarse caricature drawn by a bitter radical artist of a penny-pinching man of wealth—Scrooge, or David Balfour's miserly uncle, or the rich squire who forecloses the mortgage in an old-fashioned melodrama.

Another Shonokin had pulled on a dark robe with a hood, like that of a monk. A third was strapping a belt with an old sword around his waist, and setting on his head a visored cap. And yet another put on something like a mortar-board.

The interpreter lounged by the rock where Collins sat. "Do you feel better?" he asked gently. "More at home, now that you see your friends, the powers that men best admire and trust?"

"I see no friends," replied Collins stoutly, "and none of you see a friend in me."

"Let me introduce you." The interpreter made a truly graceful gesture toward the chief in the top hat. "Here is the man of riches and position in your society, probably the most envied person of your race. Here," and he waved toward the one in the robe, "is your man of religion, your priest. In the sword-belt you see the soldier, your man of might, on whom you depend when force—the final argument—must settle differences. And in the flat hat comes the professor, your man of education."

"They look like a hard times party," sniffed Collins.

HE WAS right. Thunstone knew it, and the interpreter knew it, too, for he emitted a Shonokin laugh.

"I say they are your friends, Collins. You are bound and helpless, and we, the Shonokins, will raise upon you those whom we worship. But these, your own people, the best of your own people, will stand by you to protect you. Can they avail you against our deities? Money, pride, religion, the soldier's sword, the professor's wisdom?"

"Just set my hands free—" began Collins.

"Oh, that stupidity!" cut in the interpreter. "You could not even win free from us, simple Shonokins. How can you oppose the deities? No human being can."

"I can think of one," Collins told him.

"And I can read your mind. Is his name —Thunstone?"

Collins was silent.

"I can read your mind," repeated the interpreter. "We know Thunstone. We have competed with him before this. I will say that you have something of a point—his part of the competition has not been wholly unsuccessful. But he is not here. Nobody is here. Your hopes are—what is your expression?—wishful thinking."

"Maybe," said Collins, and shut his mouth tight.

The interpreter was turning to speak to the other Shonokins. Their language was utterly incomprehensible, full of amazingly complex accentings, perhaps too much for a mouth shaped as a human being's mouth is shaped. Undoubtedly it had its complexity of syntax, too. But here and there was a syllable or an inflection that struck Thunstone as familiar. He wished that Lovecraft were alive to see and hear—Lovecraft knew so much about the legend of Other-People, from before human times, and how their behaviors and speech had trickled a little into the ken of the civilization known to the wakeaday world. De Grandin, too—a Frenchman, a scientist, and with the double practicality of his race and education. De Grandin would be interested to hear of all this later. Thunstone had no doubt that he would survive to tell de Grandin about it, over a bottle of wine at Huntington, New Jersey.

The Shonokins who were in costume moved away from the others, who squatted expectantly to watch. The priest-mocker lifted a hand and made a sign in the air, not the sign of the cross, but nearly. The other three, the travesties of soldier, scholar and squire dropped to their knees. The priest-Shonokin said something that made the watchers snicker. Plainly a travesty of human religious rites. . . .

Thunstone could have groaned in contempt. He kept silent, but he smiled and his lips made the motion of spitting.

As little of originality and wit as this! The Shonokins had taught it to ancient devil-worshippers, or the ancient devil-worshippers had taught it to the Shonokins. No way of telling, and no particular value in being able to tell. The important thing was that what they called worship was only a reversal, a burlesque, a stupid fatuous rebellion. He had known addled old women who recited the Lord's Prayer backward, a conceited and stuffy pseudo-poet who had hashed together garblings of many ceremonies and called them a new cult of wisdom. These Shonokins were doing the same thing, and not doing it very well. Thunstone debated for a moment the policy of walking right in among them, knocking them down with his boulder-like fists, conquering them at the very door of their strange light-giving temple. Then he stayed right where he was.

WHILE the mock-ceremony went on with the four costumed ones, another Shonokin walked slowly and stiffly toward the four-towered building. His arms were lifted, his fingers trembled and twitched.

As he came close, he raised his voice, not in speech or in song, but in a cry. It was musical, prolonged and steady, like a blast from a bugle.

The bat-things in the upwash of light fluttered, swirled, and sailed away as if carried by a blast of wind. Something darker than the material of the walls rose into sight, midway between the towers.

It was a head, with horns upon it. A moment more, and it was joined by another horned head.

"You see?" the interpreter prompted Collins. "Other human beings have seen, too, but have not gone away to describe the sight. They come for you, that pair, but why should you be afraid? The greatest powers of the human race stand between you and them."

And indeed the five burlesque-makers had ceased their travesty on religious service, and were drifting toward Collins. They formed around him in a purposeful-seeming group, facing toward the building. Their bodies seemed tense and hostile inside their ridiculous costumes. They looked now like a bodyguard, hastily gathered but determined, for the prisoner.

Now Thunstone took a quarter of a second for self-congratulation. He had felt the impulse to show himself and give battle, and had he done so it would have been poorly timed. As things were turning out, he had three points, well separated, to watch—the group around Collins, the larger group of Shonokin spectators, and the building, from which the horned heads were emerging.

Each of the horned heads was set upon shoulders, bony and high, like the shoulders of an Egyptian statue. Bodies came into view, a long leg apiece came over the top of the wall, and the beings slithered and swung to the ground outside. They were tall and dusky, at the same time faintly glossy, like reptiles. They moved erect toward the two groups. It seemed to Thunstone that they were slightly transparent, like painted figures on glass.

The Shonokin whose bugle-like call had summoned the pair of things gave another cry, wilder and shriller, and threw himself on his face. So did the other Shonokins who watched. But those by Collins—the five in costume and the interpreter—drew themselves more tense. One of them made a noise like a menacing growl.

"Don't you think they'll protect you, Collins?" murmured the interpreter. "No, don't get up from that rock. You'll only attract attention to yourself the more quickly."

"You ought at least to tell me what it's all about," came the voice of Collins, and his teeth were set to keep the words steady. "You may not worry about rights and wrongs, but I do. I have all my rights and wrongs to mind. I've earned an explanation."

"You shall have it," the interpreter agreed smoothly. "Not that we recognize any claims of yours, Collins, but your knowing the truth is part of—of what happens here. In the simplest terms, let me say that we Shonokins and you men are enemies. You are usurpers, thieves, impostors on the throne of the world's rule. You've ruled badly, let it be said in passing. We are the rightful heirs, the true owners. We don't want you in our way. To be specific, we don't want you."

THUNSTONE listened, but his eyes were on the horned things that moved slowly out from the building. Their feet did not stir, they seemed to float . . . their feet? They had no feet. Thunstone remembered the tales of the Jumbee, of Sasabonsam and Tulia Viega and other devils of many lands. These beings stopped at the ankles. They floated nearer and nearer, just above the ground.

"Something—happened to one of us, down in the town," the interpreter was telling Collins. "One of your people struck one of ours. He fell. He did not move. We don't like that, Collins. We do things about it, or we aren't worthy in our lives. That is why we are exchanging you for our lost brother. Not a fair exchange, but it may satisfy Those."

Thunstone could sense the capital letter. As the interpreter said "Those," he gestured gracefully toward the approaching horned things.

It made sense to Thunstone. Shonokins feared their own dead, and for reasons he wished he understood fully. This ceremony

was a sacrifice of some sort. But the interpreter had also said that the costumed Shonokins would protect Collins, in their roles of human leaders. Mockery was there, but mockery of what?

"Here Those come," said the interpreter.

The horned beings had floated as near as the main group of Shonokins, every one of which lay flat and limp, as though unconscious. They were close enough for Thunstone to see in detail. One wore a loose robe or gown, the other was naked and scaly. They had enormous ears, their eyes were deepset and glowing under heavy ridges, they seemed to have bestial teeth. Through them Thunstone could see the ground and the horizon beyond.

They skimmed, at ankle height, over the prone worshippers, just clearing them. There was a flash of light in the sky, as though a bolt of lightning had fallen, but no thunder.

"Now!" cried the interpreter, stooping almost to Collins's ear. "Trust in your friends to save you from Those!"

For the beings were swooping toward the group around the prisoner.

The four costumed Shonokins, who had poised themselves tensely motionless for so long, now closed in around Collins. To the fore was the gray chief in his ridiculous top hat. He lifted the skull-nobbed staff. The others set themselves as for battle. Their hands lifted menacingly, crooked claw fashion. The interpreter walked swiftly backward, his eyes on the scene. He backed toward the spot where Thunstone hid. He made a chuckling sound in his throat, though it may not have been laughter.

"I wish you joy of what is going to happen to you," he called to Collins.

Thunstone moved quickly into the open and got his hands on the interpreter.

He acted more decisively and violently than in his struggle with the sentry on the slope trail. One hand closed on the slim neck, the other caught at a band that held the garments at the waist. With a quick and complete gathering of his strength, Thunstone swung the Shonokin from the ground, then muscled him at arm's length overhead, as an athlete at an exhibition lifts a bar bell. Up came one of Thunstone's knees, and down came the Shonokin, spine downward, upon and across it. The spine broke like a dry stick. Still clutching and carrying the limp body, Thunstone ran forward.

The four Shonokins had faced the horned ones as they approached, and at the last moment they, too, had fallen face downward, cowering and scrabbling. That was the crown of the ceremony, the finale of the mockery. A human prisoner, around whom representatives of human strength had gathered, and then a falling away to denote the powerlessness of man's devices —somebody could and should write a definitive essay on Shonokin humor as manifested in Shonokin malice.

But before the horned pair could move in over the prone figures, Thunstone had tramped to the rock and braced himself before it. He held out his victim, second of the night, at the full length of his strong arms.

"I give you this," he said.

THEY screamed. Everything screamed the air full of noise. The shrill high chorused note drove into the ears like a needle, shook the flesh like a current of electricity. Any man but Thunstone, perhaps, would have dropped what he held. Undoubtedly that is what the scream was for. Since Thunstone did not drop the corpse of the Shonokin, he will never know exactly.

The noise died. The two horned ones were floating back, as curtains sag when the wind dies. Around Thunstone the Shonokins in their costumes were scrambling erect, and moving away. Their fear of a dead Shonokin was greater than their fear of Those they worshipped.

"You don't want it?" Thunstone inquired. "But you'll take it."

He raised the limp form shoulder high, and threw it sprawling through the air toward the horned ones. At the same time he ran toward them. One put out a talon-hand, and it touched Thunstone's sleeve. He felt his flesh burn as if from a blow with a red hot iron, and part of his coat blazed up and fell away. But the thing was only trying to ward him off, not grasp him The two retreated. And the Shonokins, forsaken and in terror, were running.

They yelled and jabbered as they ran, all in a scrambling turmoil for the trail and down the slope. Thunstone gazed after them, and tore away his burnt sleeve. The shirt beneath it bore a jagged black print, like a brand in the shape of a claw-fringed hand. He had time at last to speak to Collins.

"Are you all right?"

Collins did not answer. Thunstone took a step nearer, bent and tugged at the metal band. Its fastening gave way as he pulled, and Collins, free, stood up.

"Would you believe it, sir," he said, "I knew all the time you'd be here."

"You'll forgive me for finding that a little hard to believe," replied Thunstone, his eyes still fixed on the two horned shapes. They had drifted a little backward toward their castle-lair. Between them and himself lay the corpse of the Shonokin interpreter, its head lolling and its back interestingly broken. Apparently they were as furtive of it as were the Shonokins themselves.

"Without knowing you were there, and that you'd come at the right time," went on Collins, "how do you think I could stand to—"

"Thanks for trusting me," said Thunstone. He put away the thought that he himself had not known the right time to show himself, and that more through chance than otherwise he had seized upon the right time at last. "Stay close behind me when I—wait, listen!"

THERE were wails and jabberings down the trail. The fleeing Shonokins had come to the point where Thunstone had slain and left his first victim of the evening. The sight and sense of their dead companion drove the living Shonokins into an ecstasy of unreasoning terror. In terror, too, were the horned things they said their prayers to, in frank terror of a Shonokin corpse.

"I get the angle," said Crash Collins suddenly, as though he had been reading Thunstone's mind.

"Angle?" repeated Thunstone dully. Again he stooped, took hold of the dead interpreter, and lifted the limp body. Carrying it, he moved cautiously toward the horned pair, saw them retreat before him. They wanted none of that corpse's nearness.

"It's like this," went on Collins rapidly. "Simple when you realize it. The Shonokins hate their own dead—well, so do we, though maybe we don't go quite as crazy from fear and disgust. But their—their gods, if they are gods. Those." Collins faced toward the two figures that dangled clear of the ground. "They can't stand dead Shonokins, either. Don't you see why?"

"I see why," nodded Thunstone, and he did.

There must be only so many Shonokins alive. Men knew things about them—not many things, but some things. It was said that a Shonokin could die only by accident or violence. There were no females. No young. At least no human being had ever seen or heard of female Shonokins or young Shonokins. The Shonokins who wanted to possess the world again could not bring into that world any new Shonokins.

That must be why they dreaded death among them. When a Shonokin died, he was gone. Nothing was born to take his place. The cowering of Those made it possible, even plain. Because gods or devils or spirits can exist only if they are served and believed in. If Shonokins were to be killed, Those would be worshipped less. If all the Shonokins died, what would become of Those?

Thunstone approached again. The horned shapes were fleeing to their lair, climbing its wall like monkeys, dropping out of sight into its coldly flaming interior.

Thunstone walked almost up to the wall. There was silence beyond it.

"Throw the body in after them," suggested Collins, at his elbow.

It was hard to do, but they managed it. Thunstone seized an arm and a leg. Collins took similar holds on the other side. They swung the sagging form backward and forward, backward and forward, while Thunstone counted to get them into rhythm. "Three," he said, and they heaved it with all the strength in both their bodies.

The dead thing soared upward, seemed to catch at the very top of the wall, then slid inside.

A howl went up and, it seemed to Thun-

stone, a paler, stronger blaze of light. A moment later the door swung outward, and Thunstone had just time and wit to catch Collins by the shoulder and hustle him bodily back and up, upon higher ground to one side.

Liquid gushed out of the door. It was gleaming liquid, with something of the deadish light that shines in and upon the sea, in certain tropical latitudes where myriads of tiny phosphorescent animals fill the waves with the seeming of cold fire. It made a torrent on the slope, and downward. Again Thunstone heard the Shonokins yell from below. They had something practical to fear now, for that flood was following the trail they had taken, like the bed of a stream. They yelled, and then their yells blurred and bubbled, as if overteemed with the flow.

"What kind of stuff is that?" demanded Collins. He sniffed in the night. "I don't exactly smell it, but my nose feels it, somehow."

"Let's get away from here."

The two of them retreated along the slope. They came to a high rock. Climbing to its top, they were able to see. A moon was coming up at last, and the valley where the Shonokin town had been built also sent up light, the light of the strange liquid, like a reflection of the moonglow.

"What's become of Those?" asked Collins.

"Perhaps nothing," replied Thunstone. "We won't know for a while. We won't ever know, unless we come back, very carefully and very intelligently, to find out. What I think is that they have been partially defeated and badly frightened. They wanted certain things tonight—yourself, for one. They didn't get you. Instead, they got the cold meat of one of their followers. It caused an explosion and overflowing of—"

"Probably," put in Collins, "they've had that stuff pent up here for a threat to the town below."

"Probably," agreed Thunstone. "It got out of hand, and it must have killed more Shonokins. Fewer worshippers by far than this time last night. It can't be pleasing to Those."

"Licked on their home grounds, huh?" said Collins, and his voice was savagely triumphant. "Let's strike out across the heights here. We don't know the country, but by morning we ought to reach some sort of a settlement—" He broke off and permitted himself a shudder, such a shudder as he had scorned to allow himself when Shonokins were all around him, exultant and sure of his doom. "A human settlement," he amplified.

"All right, let's start," Thunstone told him. "There's moon enough for us to see the country and remember it. For we'll want to know a way back, when we return to Araby."

THEY came back a week later, Thunstone and Crash Collins and three other men, carefully selected by Thunstone. The day they chose was a fortunate day, they had been assured. They came prepared in a variety of ways, for any sort of trouble they could imagine waiting.

There was no trouble. There was nothing. The town of Araby had been on that slope, and was there no more, nor even a trace to show where it had been. Not a house, nor a hole to show the basement-position of a house, nor one of the pavements that had been strange underfoot in the night, nor even the station house by the railroad track.

"Licked on their home grounds." Thunstone remembered that Collins had so described what had happened to the Shonokins.

Naturally the spot would be distasteful, unendurable. They were gone.

He tried to find the place where the castle had crowned the slope. He could not even be sure of where it had stood. Had he been sure he might have found there, at least, a trace of the Shonokins and of Those they prayed to.

"I know I wasn't dreaming," said Crash Collins at length. "But maybe these gentlemen think both of us were dreaming."

The three others shook their heads, and the oldest said courteously that he knew Thunstone would never have brought them so far just for the sake of an idle dream.

The Night

BY RAY BRADBURY

YOU are a child in a small town. You are, to be exact, eight years old, and it is growing late at night. Late, for you, accustomed to bedding in at nine or nine-thirty; once in a while perhaps begging Mom or Dad to let you stay up later to hear Sam and Henry on that strange radio that was popular in this year of 1927. But most of the time you are in bed and snug at this time of night.

It is a warm summer evening. You live in a small house on a small street in the outer part of town where there are few street lights. There is only one store open, about a block away. Mrs. Singer's. In the hot evening Mother has been ironing the Monday washing and you have been intermittently begging for ice cream.

Your Mother and yourself are all alone at home in the warm darkness of summer.

Night is more than darkness; it is life and death and all things beyond our feeble knowledges

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Finally, just before it is time for Mrs. Singer to close her store, Mother relents and tells you to:

"Run and get a pine of ice cream and be sure she packs it tight."

You ask if you can get a scoop of chocolate ice cream put on top, because you don't like vanilla, and Mother agrees. You clutch the money and run barefooted over the warm evening cement sidewalk, under the apple trees and oak trees toward the store. The city is so quiet and far off, you can hear the crickets sounding in the spaces beyond the hot indigo trees that hold back the stars.

Your bare feet slap on the pavement, you cross the street and, a lonely little boy, find Mrs. Singer moving ponderously about her business, singing Yiddish melodies.

"Pint ice cream. Chocolate on top. Yes," she says.

You watch her fumble the metal top off the ice-cream freezer and manipulate the scoop, packing the cardboard pint chock full with "chocolate on top, yes." You give the money, receive the chill, icy pack, and rubbing it across your brow and cheek, laughing, you thump barefootedly homeward. Behind you, the lights of the lonely little store blink out and there is only a street light shimmering on the corner, and the whole city seems to be going to sleep. . . .

Opening the screen door, you find Mother still ironing. She looks hot and irritated, but she smiles just the same.

"When will father be back from lodge-meeting," you ask.

"About eleven-thirty or twelve," Mother replies. She takes the ice cream to the kitchen and divides it. She gives you your special portion of chocolate, dishes out some for herself and puts the rest of it away, "We'll save some for Skipper and your father."

Skipper is your brother. He is your older brother. Twelve years old he is, and healthy, red-faced, hawk-nosed and tawny-haired. Broad-shouldered for his years and always running. He is allowed to stay up later than you. Not much later, but enough to make him feel it is worth while being born first. He is over on the other side of town this evening to a game of kick-the-can and will be home soon. He and the older kids have been yelling and kicking and running all evening, having fun. Soon he will come clomping in, smelling of sweat and green grass on his knees where he fell, and smelling very much in all ways like Skipper; which is natural.

You sit and enjoy the ice cream. You are at the core of the deep dark summer night. Your Mother and yourself and the night all around this little house on this little street. You lick each spoon of ice cream thoroughly before digging for another, and Mother puts her ironing board away and the hot iron in its case, and she sits in the armchair by the phonograph, eating her dessert and saying, "My lands, it was a hot day today. It's still hot. Earth soaks up all the heat and lets it out at night. It'll be soggy sleeping tonight."

You both sit there listening to the summer silence. The darkness is pressed down by every window and door, with the stars holding up the rest of the universe. There is no sound. The radio needs a new battery, and you have played all the Knickerbocker Quartet records and Al Jolson and the Two Black Crow records to exhaustion; so you just sit on the hardwood floor by the door and look out into the dark dark dark, pressing your nose against the screen until the flesh of its tip is moulded into small dark squares.

"I wonder where your brother is?" Mother says after a while. Her spoon scrapes on the dish. "He should be home by now. It's almost nine-thirty."

"He'll be here," you say, knowing very well that he will be.

YOU follow Mom out to wash the dishes and put them in the cupboard. Each sound, each rattle of spoon or dish, is amplified in the baked evening. Silently, you go to the living room again, take the cushions off the couch and, together, yank it open and extend it down into the double bed that it secretly is. Mother makes the bed, punching the pillows neatly to flump them up for your head and then, as you are unbuttoning your shirt, she says:

"Wait a while, Doug."

"Why?"

"Because. I say so."

"You look funny, Mom."

Mom sits down a moment and then gets

up and goes to the door and calls. You listen to her calling and calling Skipper, Skipper, Skiiiiiiiperrrrrrrr over and over. Her calling goes out into the summer warm dark and never comes back. The echoes pay no attention.

Skipper. Skipper. Skipper.

Skipper!

And as you sit on the floor a coldness that is not ice cream and not winter, and not part of the heat of summer, goes through you. You notice the way Mother's eyes slide and blink and the way she stands undecided and is kind of nervous. All of these things.

Mother opens the screen door. She steps out into the night and walks off the porch, down the steps, and down the walk about fifty feet. You listen to her feet moving.

She calls again. Silence.

She calls twice more. You sit in the room, listening. Any moment now Skipper will reply, from down the long, long narrow street:

"All right, Mom! All right, Mother! Coming!"

But he doesn't answer. And for two minutes you sit there looking at the made-up bed, the silent radio, the silent phonograph, at the chandelier with the crystal bobbins on it, at the rug with the scarlet and blue curlicues on it. You stub your toe on the edge of the bed purposely to see how much it hurts. Quite a bit.

Whining, the screen door opens, and Mother says:

"Come on, Shorts. We'll take a walk."

"Where to?"

"Just down the block. Come on. Better put your shoes on, though. You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. I'll be all right."

You take her hand and together you walk down St. James Street. You smell lilacs in blossom; fallen apples lying crushed and odorous in the deep grass. Underfoot, the concrete is still warm; and the crickets are sounding louder against the darkening dark. You reach a corner, turn, and walk toward the ravine.

OFF somewhere, a car goes by, flashing its lights in the distance. There is such a complete lack of life, light and activity. Here and there, back off from where you are walking toward the ravine, you see faint squares of light where people are still up. But most of the houses, darkened, are sleeping already, and there are a few lightless places where the occupants of a dwelling sit talking low dark talk on their front porches. You hear a porch swing squeaking as you walk past.

"I wish your father was home," says Mother. Her large hand tightens around your small one. "Just wait'll I get that boy. I'll spank him within an inch of his life."

There is a razor strop in the kitchen for this. You think about it, remembering when Dad has doubled it, flourished it with muscled control over and across your leaping flanks. You doubt whether Mother will carry out her promise.

Now you have walked another block and are standing by the holy black silhouette of the German Baptist Church at the corner of Chapel Street and Glen Rock. In back of the church a hundred yards, the ravine begins. You can smell it. It has a dank sewer, rotten foliage, dark green odor. It is a wide ravine that cuts and twists across the town, a jungle by day; a place to let alone at night, Mother has often declared.

You should feel encouraged by the nearness of the German Baptist Church, but you are not—because the building is not illumined, is cold and useless as a skeleton hulk brooding on the ravine's lip.

You are only eight years old and you know little of death and fear and dread. Death is the waxen effigy in the coffin when you were six and your Grandfather passed away; looking like a great fallen vulture in his coffin, silent withdrawn, no more to tell you how to be a good boy, no more to comment succinctly upon politics. Death is your little sister one morning when you awaken at the age of seven, look into her crib and see her staring up at you with a blind blue, fixed and frozen stare until the men came with a small wicker basket to take her away. Death is when you stand by her high-chair four weeks later and suddenly realize she will never be in it again, laughing or crying and making you jealous of her because she was born. That is death.

But this is more than death. This summer night wading deep in time and stars and warm eternity. It is an essence of all the things you will ever feel or see or hear in

your life again, being brought steadily home to you all at once.

Leaving the sidewalk, you walk along a trodden, pebbled, weed-fringed path to the ravine's edge. Crickets, in loud full drumming chorus now, are shouting to quiver the dead. You follow obediently behind brave, fine, tall Mother who is defender of all the universe. You feel braveness because she goes before, and you hang back a trifle for a moment, and then hurry on, too. Together, then, you approach, reach and pause at the very edge of civilization.

The ravine.

Here and now, down there in that pit of jungled blackness is suddenly all the evil you will ever know. Evil you will never understand. All of the nameless things are there. Later, when you have grown you will be given names to label them with. Ghosts, leprechauns, trolls, goblins, spirits; pitiful epithets, meaningless syllables to describe the waiting gloom. Down there in the huddled shadows, among the thick tree trunks and trailing vines, lives the odor of decay. Here, at this place, civilization ends, reason ends, and a universal evil takes over.

You realize you are alone. Yourself and your Mother. Her hand trembles.

Her hand *trembles.*

YOUR belief in your private world is shattered. You feel your Mother tremble. Why does she do that? Is she, too, doubtful? But is she not bigger, stronger, more intelligent than yourself? Does she, too, feel that intangible menace, that groping out of darkness, that crouching malignancy down below? Is there, then, no strength in growing up, no solace in being an adult, no sanctuary any place in life, no flesh citadel strong enough to withstand the scrabbling assault of midnights? Doubts flush your mind. Ice cream lives again in your throat, stomach, spine and limbs; you are instantly cold as a wind out of December-gone.

You realize that all men are like this. That each man is to himself one alone. One oneness, a unit in a society, but always afraid. Like here, standing. If you should scream now, if you should holler for help, would it matter?

You are so close to the ravine now that in the instant of your scream, in the interval between someone hearing it and running to rescue you, much could happen.

Blackness could come swiftly, swallowing; and in one titanically freezing moment all would be concluded. Long before dawn, long before police with flashlights might probe the disturbed pathway, long before men with trembling brains could rustle down the pebbles to your help. Even if they were within five hundred yards of you now, and help certainly is, in three seconds a dark tide could rise to take all eight years of life away from you and Death would meet you in the full.

The essential impact of life's loneliness crushes your small, beginning to tremble body. Mother is alone, too. She cannot look to the sanctity of marriage, the protection of her family's love, she cannot look to the Constitution of the United States, or the City Police, she cannot look anywhere, in this very instant, but into her heart, and there she will find nothing but uncontrollable repugnance and a will to fear. In this instant it is an individual problem seeking an individual solution. You must accept being alone and work on from there.

You swallow hard and cling to your Mother. Oh, Lord, don't let her die, you think. Don't do anything to us. Father will be coming home from lodge-meeting in an hour and if the house is empty. . . ?

Mother advances down the path into the primeval jungle a few paces. Your voice is all made of trembles. "Mother. Skip's all right. Skip's all right. He's all right. Skip's all right."

Mother's voice is strained, quiet. "He always comes through here. I tell him not to, but those darned kids, they come through here anyway. Some night he'll come through and never come out again—"

Never come out again. That could mean anything. Tramps. Criminals. Darkness. Accidents. Most of all—Death.

Alone in the universe.

THERE are a million small towns like this all over the world. Each as dark, as lonely, as removed, as full of shuddering and wonder. The reedy playing of minor-key violins is the small town's music, with no lights but many shadows. Oh the vast swelling loneliness of them. The secret damp

ravines of them. Life is a horror living in them at night, when at all sides sanity, marriage, children, happiness, is threatened by an ogre called Death.

Mother raises her voice into the night.

"Skip! Skipper!" she calls. "Skip! Skipper!"

Suddenly, both of you realize there is something wrong. Something very wrong. You listen intently and realize what it is.

The crickets have stopped chirping.

Silence is complete.

Never in your life a silence like this one. One so utterly complete. Why should the crickets cease? Why? What reason? They have never stopped ever before. Not ever.

Unless. Unless—

Something is going to happen. It is as if the whole ravine is tensing, bunching its black muscles, drawing in its power from all around the sleeping countryside for miles and miles. From damp dells, from rolling hills where dogs howl to moons, from all around the great silence is sucked into one tight ball, and you at the center of it. In ten seconds now, something will happen. Something will happen. The crickets are still silent, and the stars so close they almost brush your head a cosmic blow. Swarms of them. The night is still hot.

Growing, growing, the silence. Growing, growing, the tenseness. Oh, it is so dark, so far away from everything. Oh, oh, God.

And then, way, way off in the silence:

"Okay, Mom. Coming, Mother!"

And again:

"Hi, Mom! Coming, Mom!"

And then the quick scuttering of feet running down through the stomach of the ravine as three kids come running, laughing. Your brother, Skipper, and Chuck Redman and Augie Bartz. Running, laughing.

The stars suck back up in the sky like the stung antennae of ten million snails.

The crickets chirp again.

The darkness pulls back, startled, shocked, angry. Pulls back, losing its appetite at being so rudely interrupted as it prepared to feed. The darkness yanks back its odorous wet skirt and the three kids pile out of it, laughing.

"Hi, Mom! Hi, Shorts!"

It smells like Skipper, all right. Sweat and grass and his oiled leather baseball glove.

"Young man, you're going to get a licking," declares Mother. She puts away her fear instantly. You know she will never tell anybody of it, ever. It will be in her heart though, for all time, as it is in your heart, for all time.

You walk home to bed in the late summer night. You are glad Skipper is alive. Very glad. For a moment there you thought—

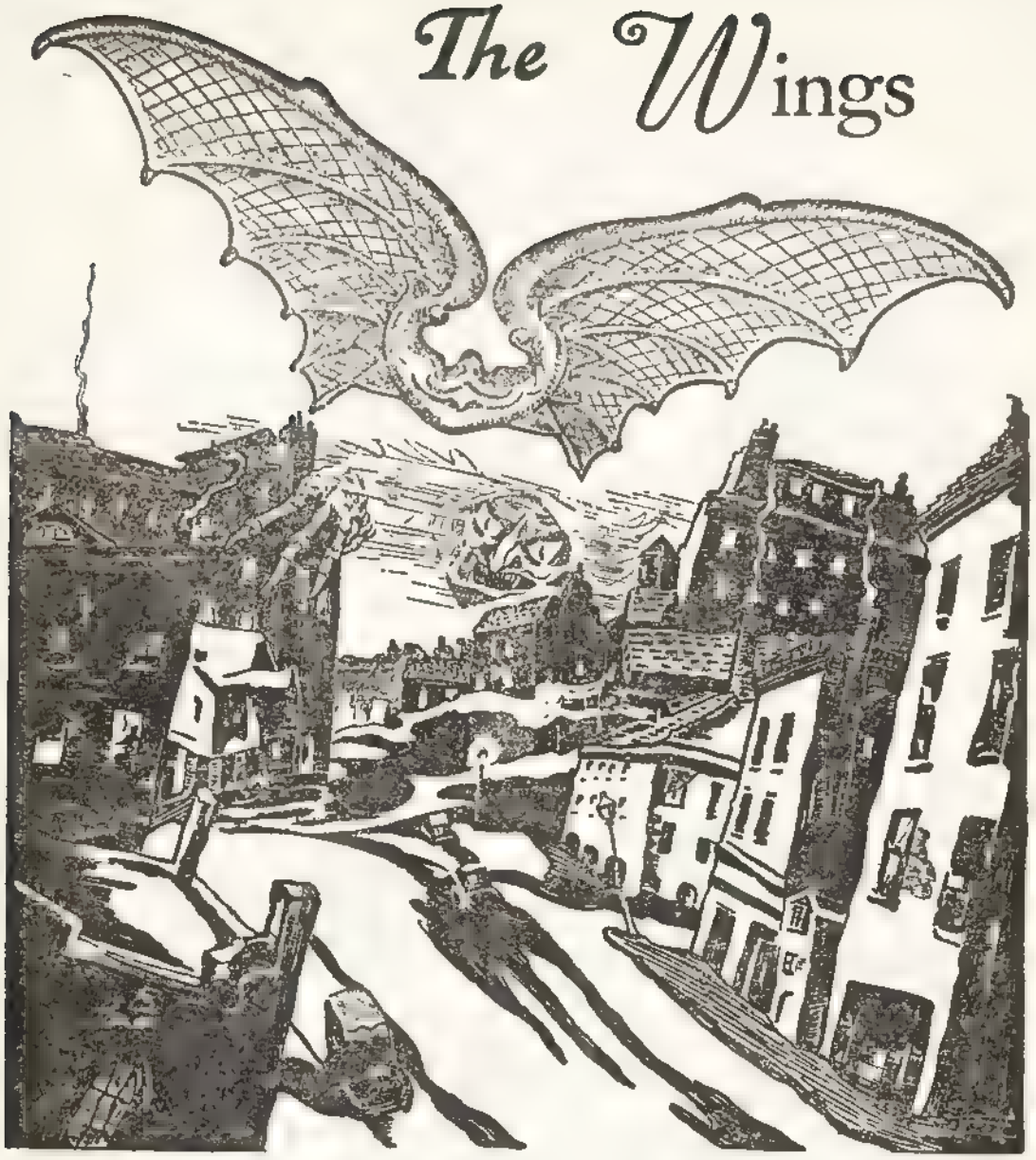
Far off in the dim moonlit country, over a viaduct and down a valley, a train goes running along and it whistles like a lost metal nameless thing. You go to bed, shivering, beside your brother, listening to that train whistle, and thinking of a cousin who lived way out in the country where that train is now; a cousin who died of pneumonia late at night years ago. . . .

You hear footsteps outside the house on the sidewalk, as Mother is turning out the lights. A man clears his throat in a way you recognize.

Mother says, "That's your father."

It is.

The Wings



BY ALLISON V. HARDING

THE light at the top floor rear of 103 North was alone in the darkness of the sleeping city. But the two marooned uniformed members of Reconstruction Police who stood on the cobble-stoned street below exchanged only amused glances.

"It is Professor Cronkiet talking to his eagle," one of them said, tapping the side of his head significantly.

There is incalculable evil abroad and much of it in men's hearts!

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

The other nodded, his lips drawing back in a wolfish grin. "They should put the foolish old man to death. He will never learn new ways. Herman Cronkiet and his eagle!"

"Perhaps he stays upstairs with the bird because he is afraid of his wife," his companion interjected.

The two RP men laughed boisterously at that and walked off down lonely sidewalks until the sound of their merriment was small in the distance.

Upstairs in the rudely furnished attic room of 103 North, Professor Cronkiet paused briefly in his work at the sounds from below. He sat for a moment in the wicker chair near the window. On the other side of the room, its taloned feet gripped around the cross-bars of a rough wooden perch Cronkiet had built, was the tame eagle. A powerful creature, with grace and strength apparent in its body and wings, the bird had turned up with Cronkiet one day.

In one of his walks on the cliffs above the city Cronkiet had come upon the creature lying helpless, its wing broken from some mishap, possibly with the secret Night Fleets that roared over the city. Despite the jeers of his neighbors and wife, the professor had brought the bird upstairs to his attic workshop and, with his more than rudimentary knowledge of medicine, had helped it regain use of its wings. Now the animal was entirely tame with the professor and would never fail to return to the attic window from its occasional soaring flights. But the eagle resisted with a ferocity that ruffled the white feathers of its head and neck any advances from others. Once Ludwiga, Cronkiet's wife, had reached out for the bird roughly only to have its hooked beak rake her big forearm.

Long since the bird would have been cheerfully shot and the attic ransacked of its scientific books and outre apparati except that, in the opinion of the High Secretariat, Cronkiet was, to quote them "most useful." And so he was humored—in his completely harmless way.

Because of his scientific standing and known sympathies, Cronkiet's was the place in this district where the gentlemen from the Patrol came every three months for International Inspection. The outer world knew and thought well of Professor Herman Cronkiet; consequently, reasoned the Secretariat, he was a most splendid "front" man, no?

PATROL for this district was taken care of by a Mr. Edward Boskins of Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A. Middle-sized in stature and over-sized in stomach, with a round, red twinkling face Boskins was a sharp contrast to the spare, almost emaciated and frail figure of the professor. The difference in the two men's minds was as marked; Boskins was not dull, but certainly unimaginative. His chronic cheerfulness and optimism about the world was dulled only by his homesickness at having to leave his beloved Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A. Cronkiet, of course, had the quick, agile and brilliant mind of a gifted scientist.

Yet between the two a bond sprang up. It was of such a deep nature that some time ago when Boskins arrived for one of his Patrol visits and was told of the professor's mishap his pink face lost all its color and he was not able to eat the fine spread Ludwiga had set for him (with the help of special rations from the Secretariat) but instead rushed to his friend and put his arms around him.

"How did it happen, you poor old fellow," he asked although obviously a man who had newly lost his tongue would not be able to answer.

"Industrial accident," supplied Ludwiga tight-lipped. A member of Reconstruction Police who happened to still be there after guiding Boskins from the air terminus nodded acquiescence.

The plump little man looked from one to another and back to Cronkiet. "Dear friend," he murmured, "I am so sorry."

Cronkiet reach for the pad and pencil near his elbow and wrote in large letters, while the three watched closely, "It is all right. I do not mind so much."

But Boskins was so upset that he was unable to start on his investigation tour of this district. By nature the little man was fond of people but he found himself disliking Ludwiga and wondering more than ever why Cronkiet had married such a person.

She seemed so, well, disinterested in her husband's plight. Boskins thought affectionately of how his wife back in Peoria would feel if he had such an accident and

the thinking almost brought tears to his eyes. He found himself fascinated by Ludwiga's stature as she sat across from him, near the professor. Her legs were muscular and huge like tree trunks, her body broad and solid and her big red arms powerful. Boskins pitied the frail professor so. But there was no accounting for tastes and that was not his business anyway.

The "industrial accident" which had rid Herman Cronkiet of his tongue was the idea of Ludwiga and the High Secretariat. The old scientist was so inescapably and hopelessly allied with the old days and old traditions. How many times had he been heard to remark—in front of RP men and officials even—that "State-ism in any form is a violation of the rights of individual's" and prattlings about the "brotherhood of men," and so on?

But beyond that there was the important matter of Mr. Boskins and his trips to the city. These patrol investigations, to be sure, were carefully planned so as to avoid certain "areas" where smoke from underground factories might be apparent or where stores of material for anti-photo reconnaissance construction were collected.

STILL the High Secretariat felt that the situation was so delicate; a careless word by Professor Cronkiet, a hint—although surely the scientist knew that any overt action would result in the immediate disappearance of both Boskins and Cronkiet in some "tragic plane crash." It would take so little, though. A slip of the tongue—that was all.

So it was decided that there would be no slips of Professor Cronkiet's tongue! After the "industrial accident" the professor was cautioned that any inappropriate use of pencil and paper would surely result in another mishap, this time perhaps involving the eyes—or worse!

As Herman Cronkiet sat in the chair and peered out the casement over the sleeping city, his thin, blue-veined hands clasped in his lap, he thought of these matters.

In a few days more Edward Boskins would be arriving for his quarterly inspection. Cronkiet looked forward to these visits from the round, jolly little man. Far more than threats against himself made by the Secretariat, the professor feared what would be done to unsuspecting Boskins if officials detected the slightest hint of "communication" between the two. Aside from that, Boskins was prosaic, unimaginative. His mind on the business at hand, which was the driving through a certain number of streets and the inspection of certain areas—and then home to Peoria as fast as he could go.

No, there was no solution that way. And yet there was the need for communicating so much to the outside world. A world as totally unsuspecting as little Boskins. It was too late in the world's destiny for hints; Cronkiet had thought of notes slipped into Boskins' belongings but the chances of getting away with such a bald trick were nil. Systematically, the two men were kept under constant surveillance; a "guard of honor" Boskins was told. Too, the little man's effects were searched regularly.

Herman Cronkiet must present the facts himself before the outside world. There was no other way. Even if he were able somehow to transfer some of his own sense of foreboding and urgency to Boskins, the little man would never be able to win without proof positive the sober attention of a complacent world, secure in its Patrols and elaborately set up air photo-reconnaissance.

The decision was easily arrived at, Professor Cronkiet recalled. He would walk quietly down the stairs of 103 North. He would stride along the cobblestone streets, past the grimy-faced building to the Avenue, hail the bus there and take it to the air terminus. He knew the route so well from the old, old days when Professor Herman Cronkiet was a man of his own free destiny. The way was where it had always been, the steps were there to be taken; a few yards, a few miles to the broad pastures upon which were stretched out the neat concrete patterns of air strips.

It might as well be the miles to the furthest star, Cronkiet thought. He could see it in his mind's eye. If he were very careful and evaded hulking Ludwiga he would make the street, perhaps the corner and then one, two, three maroon-uniformed RP men would fall in at his side, hands on his elbow.

"Not *that* way, Professor."

Guiding him, turning him around, shoving him gently back in the direction he'd come.

"That's it, Professor. You've got the eagle to talk to, remember?" Laughter.

And there would be Ludwiga waiting for him, ham hands on her gigantic hips, grinning at him, leering, hating.

So there was no escape . . . no escape. . . .

CRONKIET sat in the window, his tired head between his old hands. Somewhere a light blinked into being. Chimney smoke showed against a dawn streaked east. Early shift workers getting up to man the underground factories.

As he had so many other times, the professor speculated on the tragic implications of what he saw and sensed around him. A country preparing secretly, stealthily, in the night, to loose the horrendous horrors of science and man's fanaticism against the unawakened world. In the distance he could hear the sound of booted feet on the pavements. It was, he knew, platoons of Reconstruction Police relieving their comrades in outlying posts. Now it was this old, beloved city of his that echoed to marching feet; soon it would be all the continents if the strong arms and blast furnaces and cunning minds had their way.

There was so little time, Herman Cronkiet knew. So little time to walk down his stairs, passed the strong, cruel grasp of Ludwiga his wife—well, his watchdog. So little time to run along the street to the avenue, over the bridge that spanned the dear, serpentine river he fished as a boy so many years ago.

When Cronkiet got up stiffly the dawn had blossomed in the sky and there were early risers in the street below. The professor crossed to where the eagle perched. He rubbed the tips of his fingers affectionately over the white head feathers of the bird.

As he did he heard the heavy steps on the stairs that led up to the attic. Then he heard his wife's harsh voice calling.

"Herman! Come down here."

The steps continued till they stopped outside his door to be punctuated by a thunderous knocking.

"Herman! You lost your ears as well as your tongue? Open!" The pounding on the heavy oak door increased.

Cronkiet paid no heed until he had thrown open the large casement next to the eagle's perch and gently shooed the bird. The eagle teetered for a moment, hunched its massive shoulders and then propelled itself into the morning sky with flappings of its broad wings. Cronkiet, leaning far out, watched the bird's flight until it disappeared beyond the farthest chimneys, factory stacks and smoke spirals.

Only then did he turn, trudge wearily to the heavy door and open it on the huge, frowning figure of Ludwiga. She came lumbering in, her big body brushing him rudely aside. Her lips curled in scorn as she glared at the vacant perch where the eagle had recently been. She went to the still-open window and looked out. Then Ludwiga came back to the center of the room and glowered at the professor.

"That eagle is flying again. I would kill that hell-bat creature if I had my way," and her hands made expressively destructive motions. "You are to come downstairs now and eat for we are going early to the High Secretariat!"

Cronkiet nodded his head resignedly. Ludwiga looked idly around the room as he arranged some of his materials and tools. It always secretly amused him to surreptitiously watch the sneer and puzzlement on her face as she gazed at his books and the strange, useless-looking objects and articles he fashioned to "pass the time."

"Hurry up," she ordered harshly as he puttered aimlessly.

He came with her then, and the two descended the creaking stairs from the attic room. Ludwiga had a meager breakfast laid out and bade him eat. Herman Cronkiet did so slowly, his mind working over the news she had brought him. So they were going to see the High Secretariat. That meant big things in the offing. But then he had expected that the fateful moment was drawing near from the frenzied preparations he'd seen.

THE all-night labor groups that manned the hidden, underground factories had been greatly augmented. If one knew where to look for it, it was easy to detect that the smoke from secret, buried blast furnaces was thicker—and constant now. The Night Fleets roared overhead on rocket maneuvers with increasing regularity. Preparations on the Anthrx Bomb in the Germ Warfare

laboratories went on apace. Oh, the signs were plain to see if one but looked—and cared.

As a scientist he knew full well the awful impact of these fiendish new weapons which were being made ready to loose on an unsuspecting world. There was no other conclusion to come by but that the outside world would be wiped out beyond recognition within a week or two. A warned world would be able to take steps to guard itself, in an instant it could wipe out this fester-spot of evil; unwarned its plight was hopeless. And this knowledge—the haunting thoughts of what would happen to Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A., to Boskins, and to all the Peorias and Boskinses of the world—was with Cronkiet constantly, to darken each day for him, to dim the bright sun shining over what had once been his dearly-loved land.

The time after breakfast passed slowly. Cronkiet sat idly, with his eyes closed, with Ludwiga lolling opposite. Finally he heard a motor in the street, then some steps outside the door of 103 North, the clang of the bell. Ludwiga rose quickly. The professor sat motionless, until maroon-colored trousers stood before him. Cronkiet looked up, putting on the foolish disarming smile he had cultivated during the last few years.

There were three Reconstruction Police in the room. Ludwiga said for them, "We are going to the High Secretariat."

Cronkiet stood up, still smiling, and fell in between two of the men. Ludwiga and the other led the way out the door and into the motor car that waited at the curb.

The vehicle pulled away into the street and sped along the avenues and through squares until it slowed and stopped in front of the grim granite facade of the High Secretariat building.

The party of five went inside, their steps echoing along the carpetless halls, until they finally paused outside a door labeled simply Commissioner. The leader knocked and another RP man inside peered out, then threw open the door and motioned them to enter.

AT THE far end of the room, almost vault-like in appearance, a man sat behind a desk piled high with official-looking papers. He went on working at his desk and the party newly ushered into the room sat down on rude wooden benches arranged around the room.

Finally the Commissioner looked up and uttered the single word, "Ah." He got up from the mahogany desk and paced back and forth in front of them.

Cronkiet knew him. Timish was his name. He had been one of the first in the People's Freedom Movement, that bogus organization which had swept through the country, first underground, and then as it gathered sufficient strength unto itself, openly. From its nucleus the present Statist regime had been formed.

Timish was small, blocky in build, with thick dark hair that came down so low on his forehead that it left but a thin channel of skin between eyebrows and hairline. He had been known for his splendid work in "convincing" those with opposite views. Higher ups had commended his imagination in improvising ways to convert the disbelievers. The numbers of knifings, garrotings and shootings to his credit were beyond counting.

Finally the Commissioner stopped his pacings and paused directly in front of Herman Cronkiet. He stared at the professor for a moment and then retired behind his desk again.

"I have brought you here, Herman Cronkiet, because we are on the eve of great events." Timish used language as though he were not entirely sure of it. He was not primarily a talker or a thinker and was at his worst doing these. He owed his position of prominence to his actions for the Cause, which had always been more vigorous and violent and devastating for the oppostion.

"When is the man Boskins due in this district?" Timish addressed himself to the captain of RPs who had let Cronkiet's party in.

"He flies here on Tuesday morning next, Commissioner," the RP captain answered promptly, after consulting a typed square of paper in his hand.

"Ah," replied Timish and smiled satisfiedly. "Then he will not be back for three months, that is correct?"

"Correct, Commissioner."

Timish rocked in his swivel chair for a moment. Then he spoke to the room. "My good comrades, our offensive against the

stupid world will start, I have the honor to reveal, right from this very town. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the man Boskins have one of his most successful visits. He must find things in an entirely innocent state this time—and of course there will be no other time. For by the time another three months rolls around the man Boskins and his world will be utterly destroyed," and Timish pounded one fist into the other as he finished, his lips came back from snag teeth in a fiendish grin.

The Commissioner fixed the professor with his baleful eyes. "You, Herman Cronkiet, are a considerably important man now." He mused on, "I am sorry you have not been more convinced as to the greatness of this new country of yours. But I think you will do very nicely for us, for you can do nothing else." Timish cackled.

Cronkiet sat there nodding, a fixed smile on his face. An RP man nudged him roughly.

"Commissioner's talking to you."

Timish waved his hand. "Let him be. It is strange that a man with no tongue, with no mind even, should be so useful to the Regime.

"There will be RP stationed in the basement of One hundred three North during the Boskins visit, in addition to the usual guard of honor," the Commissioner went on. "You," he gestured to Ludwiga, "will stay with Professor Cronkiet constantly, to aid him in getting over to this fool Boskins the splendid and happy condition of our peace-loving country." It was something to smile at.

For a moment, then, Timish sat in silence, his low, broad forehead puckered in thought. Finally he gestured with his hand that Cronkiet was to be taken outside. Two of the RP men escorted the professor to a bench in the adjoining room and the heavy door closed on Timish and Ludwiga.

HERMAN CRONKIET knew what would be said between them; to himself he could visualize the scene. They would look at each other, the woman and Timish, talk in the facile way that two people who are much alike can. They shared a hatred of him, he knew. The deep, smoldering hatred that is the compliment mediocrity pays to pre-eminence. Both of them were completely insensitive, brutal types, without a vestige of imagination. It was not their will that he was let alone this long.

He could even figure what they were saying.

Timish would be leaning forward. "It is getting to be the zero hour. All must go well with this Boskins visit."

Ludwiga would nod her head, "All will go well, Commissioner."

Then she would *say*, "After this is over, what about Cronkiet?"

Timish would hesitate, then: "I think he should take a long vacation as a reward —with you." They would glance at each other and the meaning was quite clear.

Then she would say, her ponderous mind turning like some gigantic slow-moving water wheel, "Commissioner, I sometimes wonder if he is as 'touched' as he lets on." The height of subtlety for her massive mind.

Timish would consider this thought carefully, with all the fine mental processes that had enabled him to destroy 300 women—all unfortunately non-believers in the People's Freedom Movement—in an "unaccountable" detention dormitory fire, or to have liquidated several dozen children who thankfully did not realize (but not for lack of the High Commissioner's trying) that the chamber they were rudely pushed into was one of those that does very nicely without air, using gas instead.

And Timish would say something like: "Well, what can the old fool do. Without writing something he is unable to communicate with Boskins. After this week we will no longer need to keep up any pretense."

And they would of course agree that he not be allowed to write anything at any time, especially around Boskins—who was a fool, they kept saying—without the most careful scrutiny.

Finally Ludwiga came out of Commissioner Timish's room and when Herman Cronkiet looked everything he had imagined was written on her broad, fleshy face. With a curt nod of her head Reconstruction Police pulled at his arm and the party headed for their car outside the government building.

On the trip home the vehicle sped past more than the usual numbers of troop and police divisions. These contingents with their spades were called "labor battalions" but of course the spades could be easily replaced by the latest automatic rifles, rocket guns and flame throwers.

They reach 103 North, and the car stopped. Ludwiga and one of the RP got out and accompanied Herman Cronkiet into the building. As the front door shut behind the professor it was as if an era had ended then and there. Cronkiet's footsteps were heavy as he made his way upstairs.

TUESDAY morning next arrived and with the noon of the day came Boskins. Bubbling over, hustle-bustle little fat man, Boskins as usual.

"Hello, dear friend," he greeted the old professor fervently. The solicitous attitudes of the Reconstruction Police were something to see as they escorted the little man from the U. S. A. up the stairs of Cronkiet's house to his room on the second landing.

The inspections went as scheduled in the next few days. As Edward Boskins was driven through the streets, along the winding alleys and down the broad avenues that made up the ancient city Cronkiet himself was amazed at the peaceful aspect of the scene. And that peacefulness was mirrored in the plump face and watery eyes of the patrolman. But why not? For certainly nowhere was there the slightest indication of the teeming underground factories, even now as they drove along the cobblestone streets turning out the outlandish tools of a super-science war. Nowhere the smallest evidence of hidden airfields, rocket pits or bomb caches.

The night before Boskins left, the professor, having seen his American friend to bed, was toiling late in his attic room. Yes, it was true what they sneered about him. He *did* talk to the eagle. Softly; it was a mannerism as he worked. And he would rub the great bird's head occasionally, with worked-cramped fingers. The eagle had served him a fine purpose; it was a form of companionship too, the only kind he had had in years.

The night outside was black and still except for the occasional lights of an official car or the boot treads of police. For the first time Cronkiet found himself able to relax a bit. There had been an electric tension at the evening meal. Boskins' tours were coming to an end and the town authorities were almost over-doing the cordiality. Once at the table, attended this night by none other than Timish himself, Boskins had leaned over and plucked playfully at Cronkiet's elbow.

"Let's you and me join the eagle upstairs and I can look towards home," he'd said. Oft times the little man had gestured out the attic window, pointing west to where far away his beloved Peoria lay beyond the horizon and the ocean. It was meant as a joke. But the others and Timish, who had been bombarding the gathering with pronunciations of friendship for all mankind, had frowned. Boskins, even happy go lucky as he was, realized the remark had fallen flat. The professor had smiled wanly but the others had merely glowered.

Herman Cronkiet tensed. Moving on thick rubber tires two cars moved along the street and slid to a stop outside 103. Dark figures stepped from the vehicles and then there was the muted sound of the door opening and closing. The professor stiffened and turned from the window as the steps rose on the stairs outside the attic door . . . coming slowly, carefully . . . many pairs. The eagle on its perch turned its massive shoulders and head as though in a shrugging movement. Then came a muted tapping on the door and the single word—spoken in the unmistakable tones of Timish —"Open!"

They came trouping in led by the Commissioner, four RP, and Ludwiga. Timish's eyes were small, crafty. He gestured to one of the men to close the door gently.

"We have been thinking," and his lips smiled but not his eyes. He crossed to the perch where the eagle was. The bird rocked his head menacingly and Timish stepped away quickly.

He turned toward Cronkiet, "No noise, professor, if you please. We want your friend Boskins to sleep soundly for his return trip home tomorrow." As he finished speaking he abruptly drew a heavy calibre gun with silencer from his pocket. He

leveled it quickly at the eagle and pulled the trigger before Cronkiet could spring forward. And as the professor lunged he was caught and held in the strong arms of two of the police.

The bird crashed to the floor from its perch, its huge wings twitching as red spread across its breast feathers, taloned feet flaying. Cronkiet struggled furiously but his thin form was as nothing to the two who held him. Timish leveled his revolver again and again came the *spat* from the silenced weapon. The mighty bird's struggles suddenly grew weaker and finally subsided. Ludwiga, still wary of the powerful beak, stepped forward then and delivered a vicious kick at the eagle's head. Timish laughed and pointed a stubby finger at Cronkiet.

"No one likes the bird except you, eh?"

The professor struggled again and this time tore loose from his captors. He took only three steps, though, toward the startled Commissioner when the others closed in on him again. As the police held him Ludwiga struck for his face with her hamlike fist. He never felt that blow for one of the men hit him from behind with a rubber truncheon and he crumpled to the floor, as numbing paralysis spread quickly through him.

THE passing of time is meaningless to the unconscious. Not until those first glimmerings of thought and impression of the semi-conscious state does one begin to swim upwards back to life and the world. The professor was happy. He was a boy, walking barefoot, along the hot cobblestones to the river where he could let his parched, dust-caked feet thirst in the cool swirling currents and watch the barges go by with their singing, rough, jolly boatmen. Then he was a university student and showing the first evidences of the great scientific genius that was later destined to make him one of the most respected men of the world. Then war, wars—the uselessness, the pain and pity. The hopes for peace. His country's sad plight and the solution. The solution—how bitter that was—the new party that rose under forged banners of freedom. The planning, the gathering of strength. . . .

Cronkiet opened his eyes. He was in his bed. It must be day for light streaked the walls of the small room. He turned his throbbing head painfully, made a face at the strange taste in his mouth. An RP man sat at the foot of the four poster idly looking out the transom window. The professor lay there, trying to gather his strength. The brutal scene in the attic came back to him and he winced at its memory. So they had decided suddenly, with their small cruel brains that the eagle was dangerous. Cronkiet could imagine the mouthings, unfortunate about Boskins casual remarks, *Let's you and me join the eagle upstairs,* harmless as it had been. They had got their small minds together. The eagle! Could it not be used in some way? Boskins mentioned it. Perhaps when it flies . . . messages . . . messages to Boskins, the outside world. No one must know until zero hour. Eagle must be destroyed . . . last link crazy professor has with outside world . . . world which will soon be ours . . . must destroy eagle.

Yes, that was how it had been. Certainly Boskins could not have known. That his remark had cost Cronkiet his only true companion. . . . Cronkiet was glad of some things, though. And at least he was still alive. With his information that must be gotten to the world. Oh, Boskins if you could only know what is going on, what is in store for your world. . . .

There were steps outside the door and Timish came in with Ludwiga and Boskins. The professor turned his head with an effort and an unaccustomed odor assailed his nostrils. Surely Boskins would see he had been bludgeoned. Would not the little man go away then with knowledge that something dreadful was wrong and bring a squadron of International Patrol troops here?

Timish was talking . . . what, what was he saying!

"Since his industrial accident . . . feels that he cannot do all he should be able to for his country . . . deplorable that a man of his calibre . . . of course we don't let anyone know. . . ."

Suddenly the strong taste in his mouth, the odor that revolted Cronkiet was identified. And the whole crude, appalling scheme showed itself.

". . . the fall was a mean one," Ludwiga was saying. "A man of his years, drinking," she shook her head with feigned sorrow and placed a hand on his bed in what was meant to be for Boskins a gesture of affection.

CRONKIET'S stomach turned over . . . from the blow on his head and from the strong odor of whiskey that came up from his bed . . . diabolically soaked with spirits. How could Boskins believe this . . . and yet, yet, what would someone believe?

The little fat man crossed to the bed and sank down on the coverlet.

"Dear friend," he said and a great tear came to the corner of his eye. The professor tried to smile but the effort was a poor one. The little man's nose wrinkled faintly in distaste as the whiskey spirits evaporated from the strategically soaked pillow.

Timish hastened to add: "He's not at all himself. I'm sorry you should see him like this." The Commissioner turned away, looking forlorn and Cronkiet had to admire his acting.

"It's time, Mr. Boskins," one of the RP men interjected, "to leave for your connections."

Timish, Ludwiga and Boskins stood at the door, the little man looking back and sighing. Finally he said, "Good-bye dear friend."

"You must leave for the air strip," Ludwiga admonished Boskins and, her face wreathed in smiles, "You don't want to miss your connections for Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A."

Boskins bestirred himself then. He looked helplessly around.

"I wish I could take him with me," he spoke half to himself.

"He is a soldier of his country," supplied Timish. "He would not be happy away from here any more than you are happy away from your home, eh?"

Boskins nodded to that, but turning on the other two he implored, "Take good care of my dear friend, please."

Ludwiga's broad red face smiled again, "Certainly we will care for him. Everything. What is a few drinks like he has had. Soon he will be over that. Really we must leave immediately."

Timish nodded and put his arm on Boskins' and led him from the chamber.

For a long time after the sound of Boskins' car had receded and died in the distance the professor lay there. Finally he gathered strength enough to rise on his elbows. The effort made him very sick, very dizzy, but he forced himself to reach out for the paper and pencil at his side. If he could write a few words, make his hands work, steady himself. The RP man watched curiously as the old man forced his shaking hands to steady. The minutes ticked away and the lengthening shadows outside came into the room and darkened it. Later, returned from the airport, he heard the sound of Ludwiga's and Timish's voices downstairs, hearty with triumph.

It grew into dusk. The RP man was relieved and the sound of plates and glasses wafted up from downstairs. No food appeared from below for Cronkiet.

Finally with a supreme effort, Herman Cronkiet forced himself out of bed. The policeman followed him indulgently as he tottered across the floor. At the landing Cronkiet leaned against the banister.

The RP man called below derisively, "Commissioner, I think the professor is coming down to visit you."

IN A moment Timish and Ludwiga were out of the dining room standing at the foot of the stairs looking up. The scientist, with a great effort, forced his steps upwards, though.

"Let him go," Timish yelled through the food he was still chewing as the RP man started in pursuit. The two mounted the stairs leisurely as Cronkiet disappeared into the attic room. The scientist pulled the heavy door shut and dropped the bar into place with a sigh of relief. At least that would hold them for a few precious minutes . . . minutes necessary to think, to remember. The carcass of the bird was gone, only a few dried blood stains remained to remind him of the scene not so many hours ago. But the rest of the room, he saw, thankfully, was as it had been. He dragged some of the flimsy, useless-looking paraphernalia into the center of the room and set to work feverishly. There was so little time to assemble all the pieces of this jig-

saw puzzle . . . the world, Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A. and all the Peorias. He wondered how far away Peoria was. . . .

Downstairs Timish and Ludwiga sat idly in the professor's room.

"It is always easier if they help us out," the Commissioner was explaining. "Herman Cronkiet is not so crazy I am thinking that he doesn't know what is coming to him," the man's lips curled back. "If he decides to save us the trouble, well, all is to the good. It is a sufficient jump from that attic to the street, you know."

"Quite sufficient," smiled Ludwiga. She reached over for the piece of paper Cronkiet had been scribbling on. It was nearly dark and she had to wrinkle up her eyes to study it. She passed it on to Timish.

"What is this foolishness?" He studied the square of paper. There were lines and circles—all meaningless. Then Timish spelled out, "Peoria. . . . Hah, doesn't he wish he were going there with his dear friend that fool Boskins, eh? To sound the warning against us, eh!"

Ludwiga was looking over his shoulder. "This other word, what is that? I—C—?"

Timish frowned. "I—C—A—, yes, what is that?"

"But he wrote nothing while Boskins was here," Ludwiga reassured.

"True; I am interested though. Some code, some message he hoped to get over to Boskins." A cunning look came into Timish's eyes. "Let us see what the old fool means."

They called a HDQ Secretariat number and Timish asked for Codes. After a considerable wait he got a response. He spelled the word out painstakingly and waited. The reply was not very satisfactory for when he hung up he was frowning. "Strange."

"What?"

"The educated gentleman at Codes"—Timish both despised and was in awe of persons with learning—"says this is no code but the name of some make-believe character. Very strange."

He sat for a moment more and then cocked an ear to one side. "We will go upstairs," he decided suddenly.

They mounted the steps to the attic door and Ludwiga plucked at Timish's arm.

"What did the Codes man say?"

Timish shook his head perplexedly. "I do not entirely understand. The word was I-C-A-R-U-S," he spelled it out unsurely with a look at the crumpled piece of paper in his hand. He pounded on the door.

"Open, Cronkiet!"

There was silence from within, then small stirrings.

"Open," with more thunderous poundings. "Hey, downstairs," he hailed and several RP men sprang up the flight to his support.

"Let us in, Cronkiet, or we break the door down," Timish roared.

The stirrings from within continued.

"But what is this all about?" pushed Ludwiga.

"I do not entirely understand," the Commissioner bobbed his low-browed ape's head. "These Codes men laughed, they say Icarus is one who made wings to fly. What does he mean, this crazy Cronkiet to write that?"

Ludwiga snorted then. "It is the blow on the head. He is more crazy than ever."

They both laughed, Timish a bit relieved. But he motioned his men forward at the door even as they laughed. As their shoulders hit the wood panels there was the distinct sound of a window going up from within the locked chamber. The RP men stopped momentarily; all listened and then out of the silence came another noise. Soft, indefinite . . . and then sure . . . a flapping . . . heavy rhythmic . . . flapping . . . faster . . . flapping. . . .

Ludwiga and Timish looked at one another. The RPs redoubled their efforts and the door quickly burst inward. Timish and the girl charged in.

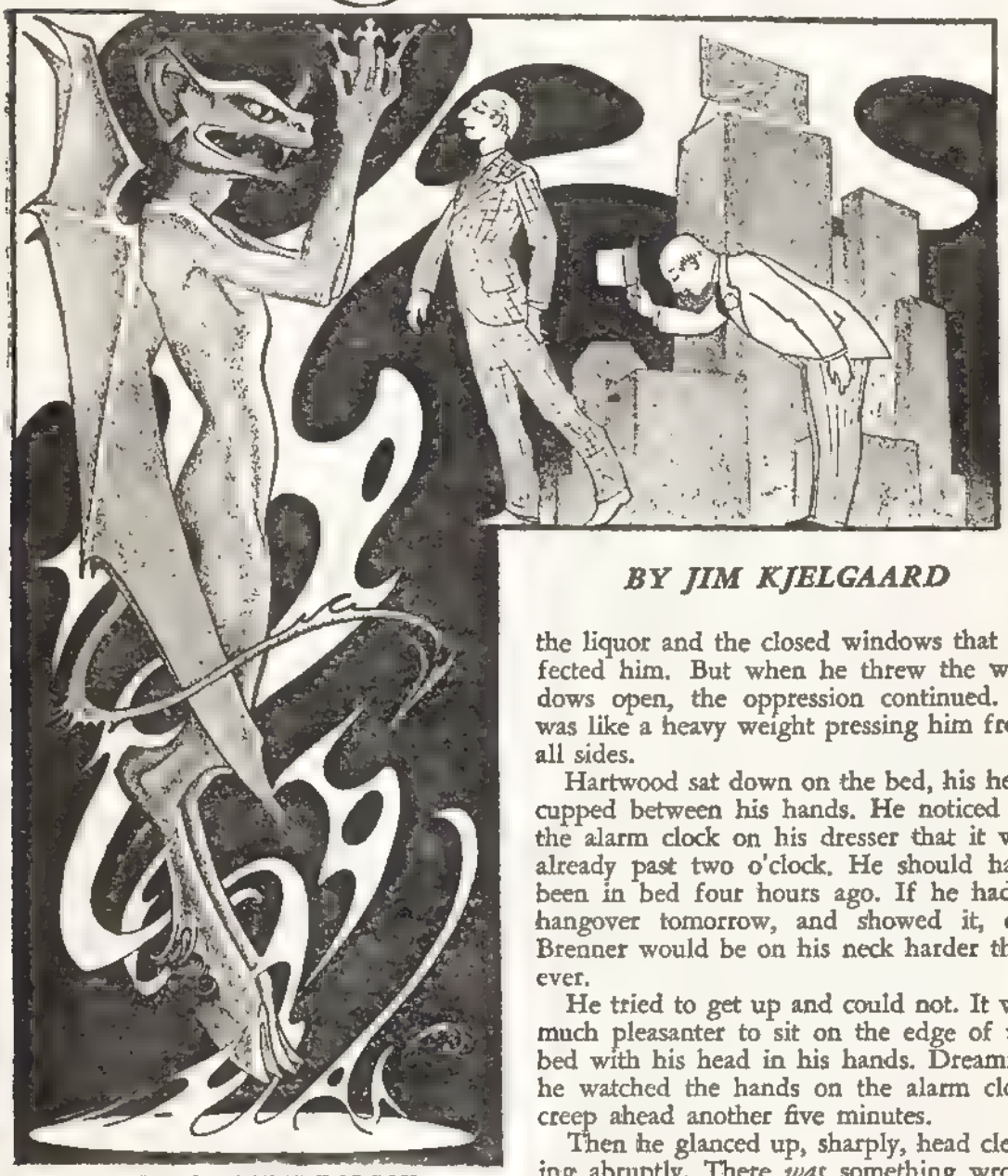
The room was empty.

"He has jumped," burst through Timish's clenched teeth and they rushed for the open window.

But a swift glance showed there was no one on the court cobblestones below. Only then did they look up and see a giant bird disappearing through the dusk with incredible speed into the West.

Into the West where beyond the horizon and the ocean lay Peoria, Illinois, U. S. A.

The Man Who Told the Truth



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

BY JIM KJELGAARD

WHEN Hartwood came in, it seemed that a smothering presence filled the room.

He figured it must be a combination of the liquor and the closed windows that affected him. But when he threw the windows open, the oppression continued. It was like a heavy weight pressing him from all sides.

Hartwood sat down on the bed, his head cupped between his hands. He noticed by the alarm clock on his dresser that it was already past two o'clock. He should have been in bed four hours ago. If he had a hangover tomorrow, and showed it, old Brenner would be on his neck harder than ever.

He tried to get up and could not. It was much pleasanter to sit on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. Dreamily, he watched the hands on the alarm clock creep ahead another five minutes.

Then he glanced up, sharply, head clearing abruptly. There *was* something wrong with the air in his room. He couldn't see anything—but he felt it. A definite, palpable vibration. Heaviness. Pressing down. It wasn't a heaviness in his head. It came from *outside*.

Have you ever sat on the edge of your bed and talked to a green mist?

Intense, intolerable *pressure.*

And then . . . it was gone.

Yes, just like that.

The sense of oppressive heaviness departed, as though whatever had come into the atmosphere was gradually adjusting itself to conditions there. Within a few minutes Hartwood felt light, gay, happy.

If he could only feel like this all the time, instead of having to drudge eight hours a day at Swazey and Sloan's for thirty bucks a week! He had been born for better things, but he never got the breaks.

Hard-luck Hartwood. That was him, all right. No justice at all. No wonder he was drinking more and more lately.

But now, he felt good. It was as though he had a hunch; a hunch that tomorrow would bring better things. Of course it was all a lot of malarkey. Tomorrow he'd be back where old Brenner could get at him.

Old Brenner, his boss, just loved to ride him. Hartwood had to admit that he was afraid of Brenner. The old crab could have Hartwood fired any time he felt like it. He knew it and Hartwood knew it.

Hartwood often dreamed of what he would do to Brenner if he ever got him in his power.

"Brenner," he said aloud, "is a dirty, stinking rat."

"That's right," a voice said. "That's a hundred per cent right."

Hartwood jumped from the bed.

HE LOOKED around. The room was empty, of course, save for his presence. There was nobody else there. There couldn't be.

The closet door was open. He peered inside. The closet was untenanted, too.

Hartwood chuckled, harshly.

"That rye's got a helluva kick," he murmured.

"It's not the rye, Hartwood," said the voice. "Look towards the door."

Hartwood blinked at the door. Gradually he made out a greenish mist. It was about three feet high, cone-shaped, with the big end at the top and the point on the floor. At times it faded so that he could not see it at all, and never was he able to see it clearly. It swayed back and forth with a gentle, oscillating motion.

The voice came from this cone. It was a high voice, and it carried no echo. It was almost as though the voice came from within Hartwood's head. But he *saw* the mist—

"Who are you?" Hartwood whispered.

"Never mind who I am," the voice said. "I want to talk to you, and if you'll listen, you'll profit."

Hartwood shook his head. It was a dream, but a honey! Sitting on the edge of his bed talking to a green mist! Old Brenner had always said he was crazy. But he might as well see the dream through.

"What gives?" he asked.

"You don't like your life, do you, Hartwood? That job—that thirty-a-week job—gets you down, as you would say? You would like to be rich, powerful?"

"Sure. I'd give anything—"

"We need not discuss giving. I do not take gifts," said the voice. "That is merely an unkind rumor. I prefer to *bestow* gifts . . . to those I feel deserving of them. You are such a man, Hartwood. I have decided to give you riches and power."

"How?"

"From this night on everything you say, provided that it can take place in the future and has not already happened, will happen. All you need to do is say it."

"Everything I say is going to come true," Hartwood repeated cynically. "Do you know any more fairy tales?"

"That's not a fairy tale. I can give you that power, but it will have to be without reservations. Everything you say is going to come true. You might test it by saying you won't have a hangover in the morning."

"I won't have a hangover in the morning," Hartwood said, and fell over asleep.

2.

THE next morning Hartwood jumped out of bed with the first tinkle of the alarm clock. He ran across the room, shut the alarm off, and closed the window before he realized that he had been drinking heavily last night and had had only three hours sleep. He should be very tired and have a headache. Instead, he had never felt keener or more alive.

Thoughtfully, as the dream of last night came back to him, he sat down on the edge

of the bed and took his pajamas off. It had, of course, been a dream—but what a wow of a dream! Everything he said, he remembered, was going to come true. He'd have to go back to the same place tonight for more of the same rye. It couldn't be bad if it left this kind of an effect.

But, by the time he had shaved and washed, thoughts of the day ahead brought depression. It would be another endless eight hours at Swazey and Sloan's under the carping watchfulness of Old Brenner. Hartwood groaned. He had worked nine years for Swazey and Sloan, and should be doing something besides menial tasks. Other people got better things.

It had never occurred to Hartwood that he might possibly get something better if he wasn't too lazy to work for it.

Dressed, he left his room and walked down to Joe's lunch wagon. He was hungry, and had just remembered that he had wanted one more drink last night and couldn't buy it because he had no more money. He already had enough on the cuff at the lunch wagon so that Joe wouldn't trust him with any more. But he would see if he couldn't work one more dodge. He'd order something to eat and jump for the door when he was finished. He'd have to move fast, though. Joe had told him the last time he pulled a swifty what would happen if he tried it again—and Joe weighed a hundred and ninety pounds.

Hartwood entered the lunch wagon and sat down at the counter. He tried to look as though he had money, but felt that he was not putting it across. Joe had been too many years in the business not to be able to size a moocher up pretty accurately. Still, Hartwood was hungry.

"Bacon and eggs and a cup of coffee," he said.

Joe slid the plate down the counter, shoved a cup of coffee at him, and strolled out from behind the counter to take a stance in front of the door. Hartwood watched him from the corner of his eye as he ate. Joe knew what he intended to try, and was there to see that he didn't try it. Hartwood dawdled over his food in a desperate effort to gain time. When he was finished, Joe still stood. Hartwood plunged his hand deep into his inside coat pocket for some papers he had there. By looking at them he might stall until another customer came in and Joe had to go behind the counter again.

"Wish I had four bits," he muttered.

But—what was this? Hartwood's fingers touched a hard round something and he drew out half a dollar! He sighed in relief. He must have put it in there and forgotten it. Casually he dropped the coin on the counter, noting with malicious pleasure the chagrin on Joe's face as he rang it up and handed back fifteen cents change.

Hartwood returned to the street, so pleased with this little triumph that the entire day assumed a brighter hue. He did not in any way connect the propitious finding of the half dollar with the events of last night. They existed for him now only as an amusing memory induced by too much whiskey.

He halted at an intersection waiting for the light to change. There was no policeman there. When the light was in his favor Hartwood stepped from the curb—and instantly leaped back to escape by inches a taxi that was cutting through the light. Hartwood glared at it as it careened down the street.

"I hope you break your neck!" he muttered viciously.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the taxi swerved in its wild flight, seemed to hang in the air for the fraction of a second, and with a thunderous crash and a shattering of glass went head on into a concrete light pole. Hartwood ran down. The driver of the cab sat hunched over his wheel, his head hanging at a grotesque angle.

Hartwood stared until he was waved on by one of the blue uniformed police, a half dozen of which seemed to have appeared from nowhere. For a few minutes he walked silently, overawed as he remembered what the cone of green mist had said to him. He shrugged. There couldn't be anything to it. The lack of a hangover, the finding of the half dollar, and the wrecking of the taxi were all coincidence. Well, whether he'd had anything to do with it or not, one fresh taxi pilot had got what was coming to him.

But he was at Swazey and Sloan's now. In guilty panic he glanced up at the clock in the hall and realized that he was ten

minutes late again. But maybe he could still get in without being seen by Old Brenner. Hartwood opened the door quietly, and made no noise as he hung his hat and coat on the rack. He tried to slip down to his desk, but just then Old Brenner came out of his office. Hartwood grabbed a ledger and Old Brenner was standing over him.

Hartwood!" he snapped. "This is the third time in three weeks you've been late."

Hartwood looked down to conceal the hate and loathing in his eyes.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly.

"This is your last chance," Old Brenner went on. "If you're late again, you'll be needing another job."

"Yes, sir," Hartwood said again.

"Such things aren't necessary. You know it and I know it."

"Yes, sir."

But, when Old Brenner had gone, Hartwood thrust his tongue to the side of his cheek.

"What you know," he growled. "You don't know a damn thing."

3.

ALL MORNING Hartwood worked hard without speaking. He wasn't popular in the office, but that was all right with him because he didn't like anybody there either. They were all fools, Hartwood thought. They worked hard without complaining, studied in their spare time, and thought to get somewhere by pushing pencils up and down Swazey and Sloan's ledgers. Swazey and Sloan took all the profits. They had the summer homes, the stables of horses, the chauffeur-driven limousines. All the rest of them did was make the money for Swazey and Sloan.

It was quarter to twelve when Swazey stepped to the door of his office—Sloan was on the road most of the time. Hartwood glanced at Swazey from under his eye shade. The old horse pretended to be quite democratic. He called all the office force by their first names and slapped them on the back at Christmas time. But he ruled Swazey and Sloan with an iron hand. What Hartwood wouldn't give to be in his place!

"Will somebody tell Mr. Brenner that I'd like to see him?" Swazey called.

Pretense, Hartwood decided. Old Swazey had a secretary to run his errands for him, and a buzzer that he could have used to call Brenner, but he preferred to do things this way so the office force would think him a regular fellow and give the last ounce of sweat they had for the glory of Swazey and Sloan. Hartwood saw a girl get up and open the door of Brenner's office. He heard her call.

"Mr. Brenner."

There was no answer. Hartwood saw the girl go a little farther into the office and heard her call again. Then she screamed, and came screaming out of the office with her hands covering her face. Old Swazey appeared again, bent over the girl who had sunk down in a chair and was moaning incoherently. She raised a trembling hand, and pointed at Brenner's office. Then Hartwood found himself, along with the seven other men in the office and Swazey, entering Brenner's office. The girls made an anxious ring in the background.

Old Brenner slumped in his swivel chair with his hands trailing down the sides. His eyes were open and staring, and except for the spasmodic heaving of his chest, he was absolutely motionless. Swazey bent over him.

"Brenner!" he shouted.

There was no answer. Swazey felt his pulse, then together with Hartwood and Jack Dorn lifted Old Brenner from his chair and carried him to a couch in an adjoining office. The old man lay full length and motionless there. Hartwood stared at him, puzzled. Swazey shook his head.

"It looks like a sudden stroke. Did any of you notice whether he seemed to be feeling ill this morning?"

"He talked to Hartwood," Jack Dorn said.

"I didn't notice anything unusual about him," Hartwood said. "He seemed all right when he talked to me."

A bustling little doctor with a black instrument bag in his hand came into the office. He took Old Brenner's temperature, checked his heart and reflexes.

"I can't understand it," he said, his brow wrinkling in a frown. "Physically he seems perfect. I never saw a case exactly like it before. It's just as though a black shade has been drawn over his mind and shut out

everything. He doesn't know enough to raise a hand, or turn his head, or speak— he's exactly like a new-born baby. He breathes and his heart beats because that's involuntary."

AN ELECTRIC shock stung Hartwood. He remembered the words he had muttered when Brenner left him. "You don't know a damn thing." Brenner didn't know a thing! Hartwood gasped, and staggered to the window. He threw it open; let the cool air caress his perspiring cheek. The hangover, the half dollar, and the taxi wreck could have been coincidence. But were they? And, if they were, could this possibly be? Hartwood seemed to be sitting in his room watching with cynical eyes a cone of green mist. Again he heard a voice emerging from that cone.

"From this night on everything you say is going to come true."

Hartwood felt Swazey's arm across his shoulders, heard Swazey's sympathetic voice.

"I know how you feel Hartwood. The firm will have suffered a severe loss if Mr. Brenner doesn't recover. But, after all, such things happen. I would suggest that you take an hour or two off until you feel better."

Dazed, Hartwood walked out of the office. He must be crazy, he told himself. He was crazy. This couldn't have happened. Before long he would wake up in his room with a hangover and have to hurry to get to work on time. He looked uneasily to the right and left as he walked out to see if anybody would look at him and comment. Nobody did. The sudden trance that had stricken Old Brenner was so much the topic of conversation that nobody had time for anything else.

Hartwood was not hungry and did not even think of food as he descended to the street. His whole mind was occupied with the cone of green mist and what it had said to him. He slid a hand into his pocket to pinch himself. The pain was real enough. A traffic cop in the middle of the street shouted at him.

"Oh shut up," Hartwood muttered.

The cop halted in the middle of his tirade and swung to halt another line of cars. Hartwood gasped again. Everything *couldn't* be just happening this way. A man didn't encounter that much coincidence in an entire life. There had to be something to it!

Hartwood continued to a park and sat down on a bench facing a lagoon. He was mightily thrilled, but more confused. He would have to have time to think. If he, Charles Hartwood, could make something real simply by saying it— If everything he said came true— The possibilities were so dazzling that his mind could not grasp any of them.

Vaguely he saw a couple of swans swimming about on the lagoon. For a moment Hartwood was tempted to say that the biggest swan would sink into the water, but he checked himself. If it didn't work the disappointment right at this moment would be too keen.

Crazy or not, he was going to be a little king for the next hour. He was going to believe that anything he said would come true. But he was not going to delude himself for very long. Of the men and women in the office, there were at least twenty whom Old Swazey would pick to fill Brenner's job before he got around to Hartwood. If by saying he was going to get Brenner's job, Hartwood got it, he would know that what had happened last night was more than a drunkard's dream. If he didn't get it, he would know that everything that had happened today would have happened anyway.

"I'll get Brenner's job," he said.

4.

HARTWOOD was still breathless and shaken when he got back to the office. He sank down at his desk, but opened no ledgers. Around him the office hummed busily. Brenner was just another man in a fairly big organization, and that organization could not pause for very long because another man had gone out of it. Hartwood thought of the far flung offices and factories of Swazey and Sloan. This office was only the headquarters, the brain cell that sent impulses out to other offices who in turn transmitted them to twenty thousand people. For nine years Hartwood had been just another little cog in this big machine. This afternoon he might take his first step up in it. Tomorrow— Who knew what could happen tomorrow?

Nevertheless Hartwood was surprised when Swazey's secretary came out of the office to his desk.

"Mr. Swazey would like to see you," she said.

Hartwood's face colored when he stood up, and his heart was pounding. He saw about him the faces of the people he had worked with all these years. They were surprised, resentful, amused. All of them knew that Swazey would have to appoint somebody to carry on in Brenner's place. None of them thought it could be Hartwood.

The secretary led Hartwood through her office into Swazey's and returned to her desk. Hartwood was nervous when he faced Swazey alone. Maybe Old Brenner had said something before he passed out.

"Mr. Hartwood," Swazey said finally, "you have been with the firm a fairly long time?"

"Nine years," Hartwood murmured.

He sensed something here that was not as it should be. In the first place Old Swazey had called him Mr. Hartwood. Never before had Hartwood heard him call anybody mister. But that wasn't all. Swazey, ruler of millions of dollars, actually seemed afraid of him! Hartwood looked for the trap. Surely he was not important enough and had never done anything important enough to warrant fear on Old Swazey's part. Maybe this was the way men got promoted—or fired.

"Nine years is a long time to work without recognition," Swazey said. "But this firm rewards its faithful workers. Mr. Hartwood, do you think you could take Mr. Brenner's place?"

"Yes!"

"Hm—m," Old Swazey sat back. "Then the place is yours, Mr. Hartwood."

Hartwood watched him through narrowed eyes, but his mind was a leaping, exulting, mad thing. Swazey was not offering him this job because he wanted to or because he thought Hartwood was the best man for it. There was something pushing Swazey, and Hartwood thought he knew what it was. He hadn't the least idea as to the identity of his extraordinary visitor last night. It was enough that it was watching over Hartwood, was powerful enough to make Old Swazey afraid of him.

"Thank you," he said dryly.

"Very well, Mr. Hartwood. Probably you are already acquainted with the policies of the firm, but I'll review them for you. It's always been our aim to pay our employees a living wage. We consider it fair to demand efficiency, but we pay for it. And, which is very important, we ask that no man in a key position do anything to injure the unity of the firm as a whole. Your job—"

"Listen," Hartwood said gruffly, "if I'm in charge, I issue my own orders. Got it?"

Hartwood sat back, amazed and a little appalled by what he had said. But something had told him that now or never was the time to cast the die. With the acquired shrewdness of one who all his life has barely skinned through by seizing every little advantage, he had sensed that Old Swazey had some reason to fear him. When a man was afraid of another anything could be done with him. Breathlessly he awaited Old Swazey's reaction.

"That's quite all right, Mr. Hartwood," he said at last. "You're in full charge."

Hartwood's brain was a dizzy whirl when he left Old Swazey to go into the office that until this morning had been occupied by Brenner. He still didn't know what had happened, couldn't realize that it had happened. He knew only that, after a lifetime of resenting those in authority, at last he was in authority himself!

He still hadn't any definite plans when, at six o'clock, he left the office. The sudden respect for him that had overtaken Jack Dorn and the rest of the office force was scarcely noticed. Hartwood wanted to be by himself, wanted seclusion so that he could think and plan.

His pocket was full of money now. Hartwood dropped into the lunch wagon and ordered and ate a plate of beans. Absently he laid a twenty-dollar bill on the counter, and told Joe to take out what Hartwood owed him. Ordinarily the bill would have been a matter for bitter quibbling. Now Hartwood paid no attention to it. He wanted no liquor tonight. He was already drunk with this new power that was his.

Hartwood climbed to his room, and sat on the edge of bed staring at the wall. His mind was a tangle of so many things that he could not separate one from the other. They came running and leaping at him and went

away again. Hartwood wanted them all. But at the same time a thread of caution ran through the disordered pattern. If he asked for too many things at once there might be a conflict and he would lose all. Big things—Big things— What were they? The biggest thing he could even begin to have any clear grasp of was Swazey and Sloan. He didn't know exactly how big that was, but he decided that he would get it first.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I'll be boss of Swazey and Sloan."

HE WAS out of bed very early. Again he felt fresh and alert, but again he was inclined to doubt that anything like this had happened or was happening. Oh, yes—he knew all about yesterday. But that was merely one day that would stand forever cameo clear against the drab pattern of a man's life. All those things would have happened anyway. He could have gotten the promotion simply because he had worked a long time for Swazey and Sloan, and Old Swazey could have considered that he was the best man for the job.

He had thought that Old Swazey was afraid of him because the offer of promotion had come like a bombshell and he hadn't been able to see straight or think clearly. Swazey hadn't fired him because he had realized that Hartwood, naturally, would be excited about his new job.

Hartwood forced himself into some restraint, but in spite of that he was at the office half an hour early. Because of long established habit he nearly dropped into the chair at his old desk. But he remembered in time and continued on to Brenner's office. There he sat down in the swivel chair and waited.

He was calm now, had full possession of himself. Yes, everything had happened naturally. If it had been a little startling, that was not surprising. But at least he was in charge of the office and all those snakes who had jeered at him for years could start watching their steps. His secretary came in, greeted him, and went to her own desk.

Hartwood opened his door a few minutes before eight, but closed it disappointed. Everybody had come in on time and he hadn't any excuse for bawling anyone out. Well, he would have an excuse for tying into somebody before the day was finished or his name wasn't Hartwood. Absently he pulled open a drawer of the desk and began to thumb through the papers there. The buzzer on the secretary's desk shuddered. Hartwood saw her pick up the listening tube.

"Yes?" All right. I'll tell him, Mr. Swazey."

She turned to Hartwood.

"Mr. Swazey would like to see you, Mr. Hartward."

For a moment Hartwood remained in the swivel chair. Swazey wanted to see him, did he? Well, all right, but it had been fun while it lasted. Besides, the most Swazey would probably do was send him back to his old job. Hartwood stamped out of his office into Swazey's.

Old Swazey sat behind his desk. Hartwood looked at him sharply. The old man's face was gray and his eyes were red and very weary. Dozens of cigarette butts lay on trays on the desk. He had probably been here all night.

"Mr. Hartwood," Old Swazey spoke in a husky whisper, "I don't want you to think there's been any plotting against you."

"I don't think so," Hartwood said, puzzled.

Old Swazey smiled tiredly. "Very well, Mr. Hartwood. I had hoped you'd take it in this spirit and are able to forgive an old man. But Mr. Sloan and I built this business up. Mr. Hartwood, listen to me just a few minutes before you take over. There are undeniable advantages to being in a position like mine and Mr. Sloan's. But there's a broader view than that.

"We have twenty thousand people in various capacities on our payrolls. That means we take care of approximately eighty thousand. If you'll continue to take care of those people as we have, to maintain the good wages we pay them, and to help them maintain the standard of living they are accustomed to, both Mr. Sloan and myself offer to place ourselves at your disposal without recompense."

Hartwood leaped to his feet. "Are you crazy?" he demanded bluntly.

Another shade of weariness seemed to shroud those already on Old Swazey's face.

"I'm sorry, but I had to say it, Mr. Hart-

wood. Of course, you may do as your judgment decides. I now turn over to you fifty-one per cent of the stock of Swazey and Sloan. I might add that yesterday afternoon I was quite sure you were going to get it. Congratulations, Mr. Hartwood."

Hartwood's jaw hung slack. His eyes bulged as he stared past Swazey's head through the window.

It worked! It was so! Everything he said came true!

Suddenly everything speeded up, as though a film were unreeling through his brain. He was thinking now of the things he could say . . . the things that could come true. . . .

"I will live forever."

"I will rule the world."

"Everybody on earth becomes my slave."

"I am greater than G—"

It was too much. His mind couldn't encompass it. Perhaps because the atmosphere was suddenly so heavy, so very heavy. . . .

Hartwood blinked at Old Swazey, trying to grope for a word, a phrase, something fitting to the newly-created Lord of the World. But all he could do was bring his hand down on the desk and call forth one of his stock expressions.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Hartwood.

The next instant he was on the floor, and Old Swazey was staring at a dead man who had been alive a minute ago. Hartwood's face held the look of one who knew, just before he died, that his soul must suffer all the torments of hell.

Moon Phantoms

By DOROTHY HAYNES MADLE'

THE years are hungry hounds that run and bay
Upon the spoor of our slow-paced delight;
Awhile we hold them with the lifted lash
Of laughter—but the moon is low tonight.

The moon behind us is a golden club
Driving ahead the shadows of the years;
They overtake ours, dark upon the grass
—Swift are the moon-cast phantoms, swift the fears.

Have you a morsel to cast back, to set
The time-hounds from our traces? See, I fling
Before their avid jaws by little store
Of garnered necromancy, and you sing
A brave, high melody, and they are still.
What is that other shadow, walking vast
Toward us? As it strides the sloping hill
Its hands hold looped grey leashes, and the pack
Runs silent to its heel. Where is the moon?
Where are the yapping shadows—and our own?

Catspaws

BY SEABURY QUINN

WE HAD been late leaving the Medical Society meeting and the cold rain of the early evening had changed to a wet, sleet-spurred snow, hag-ridden by a bitter wind, when we came out into the street. At the southern entrance of the Park my car gave a sharp lurch as a report like a bursting electric bulb was followed by an angry hiss and the sound of vicious slapping on the roadway. *"Grand Dieu des porcs,"* asked Jules de Grandin, "what in Satan's name was that?"

I swerved the car to the curb and shut off my engine. "If you don't know I haven't the heart to tell you," I answered.

He nodded sadly. "One might have guessed as much. And we have no spare tire, *naturellement*?"

"Naturellement," I echoed. "Those things are pretty strictly rationed. We just came through a war, or hadn't you heard?"

"It is the fortune of the dog we have. What should we do?" Then before I could make a sarcastic rejoinder, "One comprehends. It is that we walk?"

"It is," I assured him as we dived into the Park's darkness, heads bent against the weather.

The gale clutched at our hats, whipped our sleeves, lashed at our coats; snow gathered on our soles in hard inverted pyramids that made the going doubly hard, now and then a laden tree bough shook its frigid burden down on us.

"Feu noir du diable," de Grandin cursed as a particularly vicious barrage of wet snow fell on him, *"quelle nuit sauvage!* If only —*morbleu,* another luckless pilgrim of the night! Observe her, Friend Trowbridge."

I followed the direction of his pointing stick and saw a woman—a girl, really—furswathed from neck to knees, bareheaded and shod with high-heeled sandals, judging by her awkward gait, struggling with frantic haste over the rough hummocks of frozen slush. As she drew almost abreast of us I realized she was half moaning, half sobbing to herself as she ran.

"Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle," de Grandin touched the brim of his black felt hat, "may we be of service? You seem in trouble—"

"Oh—" she gave a little scream of surprise at his voice. "Oh, yes; yes. You can help me. *You can!"* Her voice rose to a pitch half an octave below hysteria. "Please help me, I'm—"

"Tiens, you have the nervousness unnecessarily, *Mademoiselle.* We shall take great pleasure in assisting you. What is it?"

"I—" she gulped sobbingly for breath—"I want to get to a trolley, a taxi, any way to get home in a hurry, please. I—"

"And so do we, *ma petite,"* he broke in, "but alas, there is no street car, bus or taxi to be had. If you will come with us to the other side of the Park—"

"Oh, no!" she declined fiercely. "Not that way. I'm afraid. Please don't take me back that way. He's there!"

"Eh?" he shot back sharply. "And who is 'he,' if one may ask?"

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

How easy it is to flee in terror at night from formless spectors
who cannot be, save in our imaginations

"That—that man!" she panted hoarsely, half turning to resume her flight. "Oh, sir, please don't take me back. I'm terribly afraid!" Her teeth began to chatter with mingled chill and fright.

"Be quiet, *Mademoiselle!*" he ordered. "This will not do. No, not at all. What is your trouble, why do you fear to retrace your steps? Is there anybody there two able-bodied, healthy men cannot protect you from?"

"I—" the girl began again, then seemed to take a grip upon her nerves. "No, of course I'm not afraid while I'm with you. I'll go." She swung round, catching step between us.

"I was going home from a party at a friend's house," she began, speaking hurriedly. "My—my young man had to catch a midnight train for Philadelphia and couldn't take me, so I was waiting on the corner for a bus when a man drove by and asked me if I'd like a lift, and—like a fool!—I told him yes. I told him I was going to MacKenzie Boulevard, but he turned into the Park, and when we got down to the bottom of the hill he—oh, I was so terrified! I jumped out and began to run, and—and I'm afraid, sir; I'm terribly afraid of him!"

The light from one of the infrequent roadside lamps fell on de Grandin's face and showed a look of mingled wonder and amusement. "One understands, but only partly, *Mademoiselle.* You were a very foolish little person to accept a ride from a stranger. Had you never heard that she who rides must all too often pay her passage? That the young man—one assumes he was young—should have proved a wolf was not astonishing, but you evaded him. He did not harm you. Why, then, are you so distrait, so terrified? Is it that—"

Her frightened exclamation cut through his question as her hands clenched on our arms with fear-strengthened fingers. "See! There are the lights of his car. He's waiting for me—oh, I'm afraid!"

THE Frenchman loosed her clutching fingers gently. "Look to her, Friend Trowbridge. Me, I shall attend to this smasher." Striding to the car parked at the roadside he addressed its unseen occupant. "*Monsieur,* this young woman tells us you have affronted her. Me, I do not like that kind of business. Have the goodness to descend, *Monsieur,* and I shall take great pleasure in tweaking your so odious nose."

No answer was forthcoming and he put a foot upon the running board. "I see you, miscreant. Silence will not give you protection. Descend and defend yourself—" He raised his head level with the face of the man at the car's steering wheel. There was a rustle of snow-covered sleeve against the casing of the car window, and: "*Mordieu,* Friend Trowbridge, come and see," he ordered as he fished into his pocket for his flashlight. "Look at him, if you please—and keep tight hold of the woman!"

I grasped the girl's wrist and leant forward as the beam of his light pierced the darkness and fell back a step, my fingers tightening on her arm involuntarily.

Bolt-upright at the wheel of the roadster was a heavy-set blond young man, bareheaded, and with the collar of his ulster open at the throat. His left hand wore a heavy glove, I noticed, while his right, which rested on the wheel, was bare. His light-blue eyes, probably always prominent, were widely opened in an idiotic, fixed stare and fairly popping from his face. His mouth was gaping with a hang-jawed, imbecile expression, the tongue protruding slightly, and the chin resting on the fabric of his turned-back collar.

"Oh," the girl beside me let out a shrill, squealing scream, "he's dead!"

"*Comme un maquereau,*" de Grandin agreed laconically. "Nor did he die from overeating. Regard him, if you please, Friend Trowbridge." Placing his hand on the young man's sleek fair hair he moved it with a gentle rotary motion. The head beneath his hand followed its pressure as if it had been fastened to the shoulders by a loose-tensioned spring. "You agree with my diagnosis?" he asked.

"There certainly appears to be a fracture, probably at the third cervical vertebra," I agreed, "but whether he died as a result of—"

"Perfectly," he agreed. "The autopsy will disclose that." Then, to the girl: "Was this why you were so afraid to retrace your steps, *Mademoiselle?*"

"I didn't do it—truly I didn't!" she answered in a thick-tongued voice. "He was alive—alive and laughing, when I ran away. The last thing I heard as I ran was his voice calling, 'You won't get far in this storm, sister. Come back when it gets too cold for you.' Please, you must believe me!"

"H'm," he snapped his flashlight off and climbed down from the running board. "I do believe you did not do it, *Mademoiselle.* You have not strength enough. But this is a case for the coroner and the police. We must ask you to accompany us."

"The police?" her voice was little more than a whisper, but freighted with as much fear as a scream. "Oh—no! You mustn't have me arrested. I don't know anything about it—" She choked on her denial and slumped against me, then slid to the snow unconscious.

"The typically feminine escape," he murmured cynically. "Come, let us take her up, my friend. Here—so." He grasped my wrists in his hands, forming a chair for the unconscious girl. "We shall bear her easier this way. She is no great weight."

"That's why I think she told the truth when she said she didn't do it," I replied as we trudged toward the exit of the Park. "She's a frail little thing who could no more break a man's neck than I could kick a hippopotamus's ribs in."

"True," he agreed as he eased her dark head on his shoulder. "I think she tells the truth when she denies the actual killing, but someone killed him very thoroughly less than half an hour ago. It may well be that she knows more than she has told, and I propose to find out what she knows before we summon the police. If she is guilty she should suffer; if she is innocent it is our duty to protect her. *En tout cas* I propose to know the truth."

FRAIL or not, the girl's weight seemed to increase in geometrical progression as we trudged through the sticky snow. By the time we reached the Park gate I was thoroughly exhausted and the blinking lights of the taxi de Grandin hailed were like a lighthouse to a shipwrecked mariner to me.

We carried her into the house and laid her on the office couch, and while de Grandin poured a dose of aromatic ammonia in one glass and two ounces of sherry in another I unfastened her fur coat and laid it back. "I don't believe we have a right to do this," I began. "We've no official status, and no legal right to question her—good heavens!"

"Comment?" queried Jules de Grandin.

"Look here," I ordered. "Her chest—" Beginning just below the inner extremity of her left clavicle and extending downward almost to the upper rondure of her left breast were three paralleling vertical incisions, superficial, little more than scratches, and deeper at beginning than at termination. They were about a half-inch from each other and their lips were roughened, the skin turned back like soil at the lips of a plough-furrow. Blood had run down them and dripped upon the bodice of her low-cut party frock, and the bodice itself had been torn and ripped so that the black lace of the bandeau that confined her rather slender bosom was exposed.

"Morbleu," de Grandin bent across my shoulder to inspect the scratches, *"Chose étrange!* If you did not know otherwise what would you say caused those wounds, Friend Trowbridge?"

I shook my head bewilderedly. "It's past me. If they were smaller I'd say they'd been made by a cat—"

"Tu parles, mon vieux—you have said it. A cat and nothing else it was that made those scores in her so tender flesh, but what a cat! *Nom d'un pipe,* he must have been an ocelot at least, and yet—

"Ah, *Mademoiselle,* you waken?" he broke off as the girl's lids fluttered. "That is good. Drink this." He held the ammonia to her lips, and as she gulped it down regarded her with an unwinking stare. "You have not told us all, by any means," he added as he handed her the sherry. "The young man lifts you—*non,* how do you say him picks you up? Yes. When he has driven you into the *parc* he becomes forward. Yes. You leap from the *moteur* in outraged modesty and flee into the storm. Yes; certainly. So much you tell us; that much we know. But—" his eyes hardened and his voice grew cold—"you have not told us how your *toilette* be-

came torn, nor how you suffered those wounds on your thorax. No, not at all. Our eyes and our experience say those wounds were inflicted by a cat—a very large, great cat, perhaps a panther or a wildcat. Our reason rejects the hypothesis. Yet," he raised his narrow shoulders in a shrug, "*les voilà*—there we are!"

The girl shrank back as from a blow. "You wouldn't believe me!"

"*Tenez, Mademoiselle,* you would be astonished at my credulity. Tell us just what happened, if you please, and omit nothing."

She sipped the sherry gratefully, seeming to be marshalling her thoughts. "All I told you was the truth, the absolutely honest truth," she answered slowly, "only, I didn't tell you everything. I was afraid you'd say that I was lying, drunk or crazy; maybe all three. As I said, I was standing on the corner waiting for a bus when the young man drove past and asked if I'd like a lift. He seemed so nice and pleasant, and I was so cold and wretched, that I accepted his offer. Even when he turned into the Park I wasn't too much worried. I've been around and know how to take care of myself. But when he stopped the car and leaned toward me I became frightened. Terrified. Have you ever seen a human face become a beast's—"

"*Mordieu,* you say it—"

"No, I don't mean that his features actually changed form; it was their expression. His eyes seemed positively gleaming in the dark and his lips snarled back from his teeth like those of a dog or cat, and he made the most horrifying noises in his throat. Not quite a growl, and yet—oh, I can't describe it, but it terrified me so—"

"And then?" de Grandin prompted softly as she paused and swallowed nervously.

"I hadn't noticed, but he'd drawn the glove from his right hand, and when he stretched it toward me *it had become a panther's paw!*"

"*Cordieu,* how do you say, *Mademoiselle —la patte d'une panthère?*"

"I mean just what I say, sir. Literally. It was black and furry, with great curving claws, and he swung it at me with a sort of dreadful playfulness—like a cat that torments a mouse with mock gentleness, you know. Each time he moved it it came nearer, and suddenly I felt the claws rip through my dress, and in another moment I felt a quick pain in my chest. Then I seemed to come awake all of a sudden—I'd been positively paralyzed with fear—and jumped out of the car. Just like I told you in the Park, he didn't try to chase me, just sat there laughing and told me I'd not get far in the storm. Then I met you, and when we went back he was—"

Again she paused, and de Grandin supplied the ending. "Entirely dead, *parbleu,* with his neck most neatly broken."

"Yes, sir. You do believe me, don't you?" Her voice was piteous, but the big dark eyes she raised to his were even more so.

He tweaked the ends of his small wheat-blond mustache. "Perhaps I am a fool, *Mademoiselle,* but I believe you. However, it are more than barely possible the police would not share my *naïveté.* Accordingly, we shall say nothing to them of your part in this unfortunate affair. But since they must be apprised of the killing, I shall tend your hurts while Dr. Trowbridge calls them to impart the information." He handed me a slip of paper with a number scribbled on it. "That is the number of the dead man's car, Friend Trowbridge. Be kind enough to ask the good Costello to compare it with the license lists and tell us who the owner was and where he resided."

"COSTELLO speakin'," came the well-known heavy voice when I had put my call through to headquarters. "That you, Dr. Trowbridge, sor? I wuz jist about to ring your house. What's cookin'?"

"I'm not quite certain," I replied. "Dr. de Grandin and I just ran across what seems to be a murder in Soldiers' Park—"

"Howly jumpin' Jehoshaphat, another? It's nuts I'm goin', sor; completely nuts, as th' felley says. That's the fourth one tonight, an' I'm gittin' so I dassen't pick th' tellyphone up for fear they'll tell me there's another. How'd your man git bumped off?"

"I'm not quite sure, but it looks like a broken neck—"

"It *looks* like it?" he roared. "Bedad, ye know right well 'tis nothin' else, sor!

All their necks wuz broke. Everybody's neck is broke. I wish to Howly Patrick that me own wuz broke so's I didn't need to hear about these blokes wid broken necks, so I do! What'd ye say his number wuz? Thank ye. I'll be afther checkin' it wid th' files, an' be wid ye in ten minutes, more or less. Meantime I'll send a prowl car to pick up the auto an' th' body in th' Park."

I HEARD the surgery door close softly as I put the telephone down, and in a moment Jules de Grandin came into the office. "I painted her injuries with mercurochrome," he informed me. "They were superficial and showed no sign of sepsis, but I am puzzled. Yes, of course."

"Why 'of course'?" I demanded.

"Because they bore every evidence of a large cat's claw-marks. Their edges were irregular, owing to the fact the skin had been forced back as the claws ripped through it, but a microscopic examination failed to disclose any foreign particles. This should not be. As you know, claws of animals, especially those of the cat family, are markedly concave on their under sides, and since the beast does not retract them completely when he walks a certain amount of foreign matter collects in the grooves. That is why a scratch-wound from a lion or leopard, or even a domestic pussy-cat, is always more or less septic. Hers were not. My friend, it was a most peculiar cat that gave her those scratches."

"Peculiar? I should say it was," I agreed. "I heard her tell you that his hand had changed into a panther's paw. You don't believe that gammon, do you? He probably made several passes at her with his bare hand, tore her dress and scratched her accidentally—"

"*Non*, that he did not, my friend. I did not begin to practice medicine last week, or even week before. I am too familiar with the marks of human nails to be mistaken. I do not say his hand turned to a paw; it is too early yet to affirm anything, but this I know: Those scratches on her thorax were not made by human nails. Moreover—"

"Where is she now?" I interrupted.

"Upon her homeward way, one hopes. I let her from the surgery door and went with her to the curb, where I stopped a taxi and put her into it—"

"But Costello will want to question her—"

"You did not tell him she was here?"

"No, but—"

"*Très bon.* That is good; that is entirely excellent. We shall not have her involved in the scandal. If it should transpire that we need her I know where to find her. Yes. I made her give me her address and verified it in the 'phone book before I released her. Meanwhile, what the good Costello does not know will do no harm to either him or Mademoiselle Upchurch. And so—"

The furious ringing of the front doorbell cut him short and in a minute Detective Lieutenant Costello stamped in, snow glinting on his overcoat and hat, and a most unhappy expression on his broad and usually good-natured face. "Good evenin', sors," he greeted as he hung his outside garments on the hall tree. "So it's another one o' those here broken neck murthers ye'd be afther tellin' me about?"

"It is, indeed, my old one," answered Jules de Grandin with a grin. "You have the name and address of the one we found all killed to death in the Park?"

"Here 'tis, sor. John Percy Singletary, 1652 Atwater Drive, an'—"

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin hurried to the library and came back with a copy of *Who's Who*. "Ah, here is his *dossier*: 'Singletary, John Percy. Born Fairfield County, Massachusetts, July 16, 1917. Son George Angus and Martha Perry. Educated private schools and Harvard College; moved to Harrisonville, N. J., 1937; served in U. S. Army, CIB Theatre, 1943-44. Honorably discharged, CDD, 1945. Clubs, Lotus, Plumb Blossom, Explorers. Address, 1652 Atwater Drive, Harrisonville, N. J.' One sees, but dimly."

"What is it one sees, sor, dim or clear? From what ye've read I'd say this felley wuz one o' them rich willie-bhoys wid a lot more money than brains an' nothin' much to do but raise hell. His record shows he wuz run in a dozen times for speedin'. Why they didn't take his license up is more'n I can understand. I'm not weepin'

any salty tears about his goin'. It's a dam' good riddance, if ye asks me, but—who kilt him? Who the' hell kilt him, an' why?"

De Grandin motioned toward the siphon and decanter. "Pour yourself a drink, my old and rare. The world will look much brighter when you have absorbed it. Meanwhile, give me the names of those other three young men who were so unfortunate as to have their necks broken. Thank you," as Costello handed him the memorandum, "now, let us see—" He ruffled through the *Who's Who*, and, *"Dieu des porcs de Dieu des porcs de Dieu des cochons!"* he swore as he closed the book. *"Pas possible?"*

"What's that, sor?"

"The *dossiers* of these so unfortunate young men, they are almost identical. The young Monsieur Singletary, whom we found defunct in the Park, Messieurs George William Cherry, Francis Agnew Marlow and Jonathan Smith Goforth were all about the same age and went to the same schools. Most likely they were classmates. Three of them served in the United States Army, one with the British, but all in the same theatre of operations, China-Burma-India, and at the same time. The manner of their several deaths was identical, the time almost the same. *Très bon.* What does it mean?"

"O.K., sor. I'll bite—hard. What does it mean?"

The little Frenchman shrugged. *"Hèlas,* I do not know. But there is more—much more—than meets the casual glance in this identity. Me, I shall think upon the matter, I shall make appropriate investigations. Already there begins to be a seeming pattern in the case. Consider, if you please. What do we know of them?" He leveled a forefinger like a pistol at Costello: "Were they killed because they were wealthy? Possibly, but not probably. Because they went to Harvard College? I have seen alumni of that institution I could gladly slay, but in this instance I doubt their *alma mater* has much bearing on the time and manner of their deaths. It might be possible they were killed because of military service, but that, I think, is merely incidental. *Très bon.* It would appear that there is still another factor. What is it?"

"I know th' answer to that one, sor. It's who kilt 'em, an' why?"

"It is, indeed, my friend. Tell me of their deaths, if you will be so kind."

Costello checked the mortuary items off on thick fingers. "Young Cherry wuz found dead in th' front yard o' his house. He'd been out to a party an' come home 'bout ten o'clock. Logan, th' policeman on th' beat, seen 'im layin' in th' yard an' thought he wuz out cold until he took a closer look. Marlow lives at th' Lotus Club, to which, as ye wuz afther sayin', all of 'em belongs. He wuz found dead in bed when one o' his friends called for him shortly afther eight o'clock tonight. Goforth wuz kilt—leastwise he wuz found dead—in th' gents' washroom o' th' Acme Theatre. All of 'em has broken necks, an' there's no marks on any of 'em. No finger bruises nor traces of a garrote. They hadn't got no business to be dead accordin' to th' book, but they're all dead as mutton, just th' same."

The Frenchman nodded. "Who was the friend who found young Monsieur Marlow murdered in his bed?"

"Felley be th' name o' Ambergrast. Lives on th' same floor o' th' clubhouse. Went to call 'im to go out to some brawl in New York, an' found him dead as yesterday's newspaper."

"One sees. Let us go all quickly and consult this Monsieur Ambergrast. It may be he can tell us something. It may be he, too, is among the list of those elected to have broken necks. Yes. Certainly."

WILFRED BAILEY AMBERGRAST, JR., seemed typical of his class. A rather pallid young person, not necessarily a vicious sort, but obviously the much-pampered son of a rich father. He was, as Jules de Grandin later said, "one of those persons of whom a false impression may be produced if you attempt to describe him at all."

He was plainly unnerved by his friend's death and not inclined to talk. "I can't imagine who killed Tubby, or why," he told us, staring moodily into his highball glass. "All I know I've told the police already. When I went to call him about eight o'clock this evening I found him lying half in, half out of bed." He paused, took

a long swallow from his glass and finished, "He was dead. His mouth was open and his eyes staring—God, it was awful!"

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin looked at him with his unwinking cat-stare, "there would not be a possible connection between your friends' deaths and your military service—in India or Burma, by example?"

"Eh?"

"*Prècisèment.* One understands you were attached to the Air Corps, not as flyers, but as meteorologists. In such employment you had leisure to visit certain little-known and unfrequented places, to mingle with those better left alone—"

Young Ambergrast looked up quickly. "How'd you guess it?" he demanded.

"I do not guess, *Monsieur.* I am Jules de Grandin. My business is to know things, especially things which I am not supposed to know. *Bien.* Now, where was it you made the acquaintance of—" he paused with lifted brows, inviting the young man to complete the sentence.

The boy nodded sulkily. "Since you know so much already you might as well get filled in on the rest. Tubby Goforth, Bill Cherry and Jack Singletary were stationed with me near Gontur. Frank Marlow was with the British—his father was a Canadian—but stationed near enough to us so we could get together when we had a few days' leave. One day Jack told us there was something stirring at Stuartpuram. Sort o' camp meetin' of the Criminal Tribes who make their headquarters there. We took a *garry* over and got there after dark. The natives were marchin' round and round a big mud-hut they called a temple, wavin' torches and singin' *mantras* to Bogiri, which is one of the avatars of Kali. While we were watchin' the procession an old goof came siddlin' up to us, and offered to sneak us into the temple for a rupee apiece. We took him up and he led us through a back way to a little room just back of a big mud image of the goddess.

"I don't know just what we'd expected to see, but what we saw was disappointing. We'd been certain there'd be women there—*nautchnis* and that sort o' thing; maybe some such goin's-on as are carved on the walls of the Black Pagoda at Kanarak. Instead they were all men, and a lousy lot of crow-bait, too. One of 'em who seemed to be some sort of priest got up and harangued the meetin' in Hindustani, which we couldn't understand, of course, and presently he passed out what looked like a lot o' black fur mittens to the congregation. After that the meetin' broke up and we were just about to leave when old Whiskers who had passed us into the temple showed up again. His English wasn't any too good, but finally we understood he was offerin' to sell us mittens like those we'd seen distributed. 'What good are they?' Jack wanted to know, and the old sinner laughed until we thought he'd have a spell of asthma. 'You like make yum-yum love to brown gal?' he asked, and when Jack nodded he laughed even more wheezily. 'You wear theese glove an' show heem to brown gal, you not have trouble makin' yum-yum,' he promised. 'You geeve gal little scratch with heem and all is like you want.' So each of us bought a mitten for three rupees.

"WHEN we examined 'em in the light we saw they were made of some sort of black fur and fitted with three claws made of bent horseshoe nails. How they'd operate as talismans in love-makin' we could not imagine, but next evenin' Tubby tried it, and it worked. He'd had a case on a Parsee girl for some time, but she'd stood him off. They're the aristocrats of India, those Parsees. Stand-offish as the devil. Most of 'em are rich and you can't buy or bribe 'em, and those who haven't money have enough pride to make up for it. So Tubby'd got just nowhere with the lady till the evenin' after we'd bought the mittens. He slipped the glove on his right hand and growled at her and scratched her lightly on the arm with it. It worked like magic, he told us. She was meek as Moses all evenin', and didn't seem to have a single 'No' in her vocabulary."

The little Frenchman nodded. "You have an explanation for this so strange phenomenon, *Monsieur?*"

"Well, sort of. In a few days we heard rumors of people—all sorts, men, women and children—bein' found in out of the way places and sometimes on the highway,

all clawed up as if they'd been attacked by leopards. It had the police buffaloed, for nothing like it had been known before. The way we figured it was that the Crims had taken to these steel-clawed cat's-paws in place of their usual stranglin' towel, and had the population terrified, so when the girls saw our gloves and felt the scrape of the claws they figured we were members of the Criminal Tribes—you never know who is and who isn't mixed up with them, you know. They've got more disguises than Lon Chaney ever had; so the girls played safe by not antagonizin' us."

"One sees. And the estimable old scoundrel who sold you these cat's-paws?"

"Two days later he turned up strangled to death at the outskirts of his village. We assumed someone heard that he'd shown signs of sudden wealth—you know, he'd taken sixteen rupees from us, and that's a fortune to the average Indian peasant—and he'd been killed for it. I never heard of those birds turnin' on each other, though. Funny, ain't it?"

"Very funny. Very funny, indeed, *Monsieur.* But I doubt that the old gentleman or your four friends found much humor in the situation."

"My four friends? D'ye mean that Jack and Frank—"

"Precisely, *Monsieur.* Of those who visited the temple that night and bought the cat's-paws from the old man, only you survive."

"But, good Lord, man; that means that maybe they're on my trail, too!"

"Unless I am much more mistaken than I think, you have stated the equation most exactly, *Monsieur.* Now, will you be good enough to show us Monsieur Marlow's room?"

"HUMPH," Costello growled as we entered the small neat bedroom. "It's jist like I wuz afther tellin' ye, sor. Th' felley as did this must ha' been a bird or sumpin'." He flung the window up and pointed. "We're up two flights o' stairs, a good eighteen foot from th' ground. Anybody who went out that winder would ha' had to have a parryshoot or wings or sumpin', an' as for gittin' in—how'd he make it? There's no drain pipe near th' winder for him to climb, an' he couldn't ha' stood a ladder up again th' wall. Ye don't take ladders through th' streets widout attractin' attention, ye know. O' course, he might ha' lowered hisself from th' roof wid a rope, but how'd he git up there to do it? Th' lobby downstairs is full o' flunkies, an' guests an' members are passin' back an' forth all th' time. Since there's no adjoinin' buildin' he couldn't ha' come across th' roofs—"

"It is, as you have said, a mystery, my friend," de Grandin agreed, "but we are presently more concerned with who did these so strange murders than how he managed ingress to or egress from this room. It might be that—*mordieu,* I have the thought, I have the inspiration, me!"

"Sure, have ye, now, sor?" asked Costello mildly. "Maybe, jist for old times' sake, ye'd be afther lettin' us in on it?"

"Assuredly, *mon ami, pourquoi pas?* Let us consult our friend Ram Chitra Das. He can tell us more in half an hour than we can guess in twenty-four. Await me here. I rush, I fly to telephone him."

Five minutes later he returned and beckoned to us. "We are in luck, *mes amis.* Monsieur and Madame Das have just returned from the opera and not yet gone to bed. They will wait up for us. Come, let us hasten to them. Meanwhile," he took Costello by the arm, led him a little way apart and whispered to him earnestly.

"O.K., sor," I heard the detective agree. "I'll do it, but it's most irreg'lar. They'll spring him before daylight."

"That will be time enough," de Grandin answered. "Go telephone headquarters and make haste; we have little time to lose."

"What was all the whispering about?" I asked as we set out for New York. "What would be so irregular, and whom will they 'spring'?"

"The young Monsieur Ambergrast," de Grandin answered. "They get into locked rooms whose windows are entirely inaccessible, those ones. *Ha,* but I do not think that they can penetrate a jail. No, even they would find that difficult. So, since we cannot take the young man with us and dare not leave him in his room, we shall have him arrested as a material witness and lodge him safely in the bastille for a few

hours. Of course he will obtain bail, but in the meantime we shall not have him on our conscience. No. Certainly. Quite not."

"HULLO, there, glad to see you!" Ram Chitra Das greeted as we trooped up the stairs to his second story walkup apartment in East Eighty-sixth Street. "How are you, Dr. Trowbridge? Glad to meet you, Lieutenant Costello." He shook hands cordially and ushered us into a room which might have served as setting for a more than usually elaborate presentation of the Arabian Nights. The walls were eggshell white and hung with rugs as gorgeous as the colors of a hashish eater's dreams, across the floor of polished yellow pine were strewn the pelts of leopards, mountain wolves with platinum-hued fur, and, by the couch against the farther wall a tiger skin of vivid ebony and gold was laid. The place was redolent with a mixture of exotic scents, the fragrance of flowers, applewood burning in the fireplace and cigarette smoke.

In his dinner clothes and spotless linen our host looked anything but Oriental. He might have been a Spaniard or Italian with his sleek black hair, alert dark eyes and small, regular features, and his accent was decidedly reminiscent of Oxford.

The woman who rose from the couch and came forward to greet us was positively breath-taking in her loveliness. Tall, slender, rather flat-chested, she moved with a grace that seemed more a flowing than a walk, as if she had been wafted by an unfelt, silent breeze. Her skin was an incredibly beautiful shade of pale gold, smooth and iridescent, her hair, demurely parted in the middle and gathered in a great loose knot at the nape of her neck, was a dull black cloud. But it was the strange, exotic molding of her features that held our gaze. Her high forehead continued downward to her nose without the faintest indication of a curve—the blood of Alexander's Grecian conquerors of India must have flowed in her veins—and beneath thin, highly arched brows her eyes were pools of deep moss-agate green. Her mouth was wide, her lips thin lines of scarlet. She wore an evening dress of dull white silk cut with classic Greek simplicity and girdled at the waist with a cord of silver. About her right arm just above the elbow was a wide bracelet of platinum set with emeralds and rubies, and in her ears were emerald studs that picked up and accentuated the green of her eyes. Her whole appearance was one of superb, lithe grace.

"My dear," our host bowed formally as he presented us in turn, "Dr. de Grandin, Dr. Trowbridge, Lieutenant Costello. Gentlemen, my wife, Naraini, who but for a shockingly poor choice of husbands might now be Maharanee of Khandawah."

"Tiens, Mdame," de Grandin murmured as he raised her slim jeweled fingers to his lips, "in India or Iceland, Nepal or New York, you would be nothing less than a queen!"

Her great eyes dwelt on him in green abstraction for a moment, then a smile came into them, and teeth like pearls showed between scarlet lips. I never saw a woman who did not smile at Jules de Grandin. *"Merci, Monsieur,"* she murmured in a voice so deeply musical that it reminded me of the cooing of doves, *"vous me faites honneur!"*

"And now," Ram Chitra Das demanded as we seated ourselves, "what seems to be the matter? From your rather hurried message I gathered that you suspect Indian skullduggery of some sort?"

"Indeed, my friend, you have entirely right," de Grandin nodded solemnly. "Consider what we know and what we suspect, then see if you can add the key-word to our enigma."

THE Indian made no comment as de Grandin outlined our problem, then, as the small Frenchman halted: "I think that your suspicions are well founded. These little stinkers stumbled onto something they had no business gettin' mixed up with, and the penalty they've been called upon to pay might have been foreseen by anybody who knows India and the Indians.

"You know, I suppose, that the Criminal Tribes of India number almost ten million members. They aren't just ordinary thieves and murderers and pickpockets; they're literally born criminals, just as you Americans are born Protestants or Catholics or Democrats or Republicans. Every child among them is hereditarily a criminal and is

entered as such in the records of the Indian police. Stealin', murderin' and other criminal activity is as much a religious duty with them as giving alms to the poor is to the Jew, Christian or Moslem, and to fail in a career of crime is to lose caste.

"Loss of caste is serious to a Hindu. Something like excommunication to a medieval Christian—only more so. Spiritually it dooms him to countless reincarnations through unnumbered ages; physically it has drawbacks, too. If I were to return to my uncle's palace in Nepal I'd find myself a real nonentity. No servant would wait on me, no tradesman would sell me merchandise, no one but scavengers and street sweepers would dare speak to me. As for Naraini, who ran away from her princely father to marry a casteless vagabond, if she went back they'd probably sew her up in a sack and dump her in the most convenient river.

"So much for that. You know, of course, that Hindu workmen have gone nearly everywhere—China, the Dutch Indies, and, of course, the British colonies in Africa. It appears some of these 'Crims,' as they are familiarly but not affectionately known to the Indian police, gravitated to Sierra Leone some time ago, and picked up a few tricks from the Leopard men of the Protectorate and adjacent Liberia. Some of them went back to Mother India and introduced the innovation of the 'cat's-paw'—a fur glove studded with steel claws—to their contemporaries. I heard that there had been an outbreak of killin's in which the victims had apparently been mauled by leopards in the Madras Presidency a couple of years ago. That seems to be where these young men fit in. Unquestionably they visited a gatherin' of the Criminal Tribesmen when 'cat's-paws' were bein' distributed, and the old scoundrel who conducted them decided to turn a dishonest rupee by sellin' them the devilish paraphernalia.

"You remember what happened to him. Young Ambergrast thought it odd that Criminal Tribesmen should have turned on one of their fellows. It was only to have been expected. The fellow had, to all intents, sold a lodge secret, and secret societies resent that sort of thing, some more vigorously than others. It seems that this particular renegade didn't live long to enjoy his perfidious gains.

"The *roomal*—the Thugs' stranglin' towel, you know—did for him, but there remained the matter of the young outlanders to be settled. By buyin' these 'cat's-paws' and employin' them not for legitimate crimes, but to terrorize unwillin' native girls into compliance, these young white men had put an affront on the whole criminal clan. They'd made the Crims 'lose face.' Loss of face is almost as bad as loss of caste in the East, and something drastic had to be done about it. Accordingly—" He raised his hands as if he looped a cord, then drew them together with a snapping motion. "*Exeunt omnes*, as Shakespearian stage directions say."

"Then ye think, sor," Costello began, but Das forestalled him.

"I'm almost sure of it, Lieutenant. The man or men entrusted with the job of giving these youngsters the happy dispatch is probably some member of the Criminal Tribes who has lost caste, and must regain it by their murder. He or they will stop at nothing, and if there are several of them killing, some will not deter the others, for they believe implicitly that the surest, quickest route to Paradise is to be killed while in the commission of a crime, just as they lose caste by being caught."

"An' have ye anny idee how th' thafe o' th' wor-rld gained entrance to th' pore young felley's room, sir? It looked to me as if 'twould take a bir-rd to break into it, or git out; but as ye say, they are a clever lot and may know some tricks we ain't hep to."

"I have a very definite idea, Lieutenant," Ram Chitra Das replied. "Where's Ambergrast at present?"

"In jail, an' safe, we hope."

"HE'S SAFER there than anywhere, but if we want to catch our birds we'll have to bait our trap. D'ye think he's managed to raise bail by this time?"

"I dunno, sor, but I'll tellyphone if ye'd like."

"That might be a good idea. Tell them to detain him on any sort of pretext till they hear from you, then send him back to his rooms in a squad car."

RAM CHITRA DAS, de Grandin and I crouched in an angle of the wall that ran along the alley back of the Lotus Club. The numbing cold gnawed at our bones like a starved dog, and as the sky began to lighten faintly in the east a sharp wind lent an extra sting to the air. "*Mille douleurs,*" the little Frenchman murmured miserably, "one little hour more of this and Jules de Grandin is a stiffening corpse, *pardieu!*"

"Quiet, old thing," Ram Chitra Das whispered. "We've invested so much time and discomfort already, it would be a shame to let him slip past us now. He's almost sure to come. Those johnnies waste no time and nearly always work in darkness. D'ye think Costello's on the job inside?"

"I left him and a plainclothes man in the room next to Ambergrast's," I answered. "They've left their door on a crack, and nothing bigger than a mouse can creep past them. If there's a squeak from Ambergrast's room they'll—"

"If the fellow we're expectin' gets into that room they'll hear no squeak," Ram Chitra Das broke in grimly. "Those Bagrees can clip an earring from a sleeping woman's head and never make her miss a snore, and when it comes to usin' the *roomal* —they can kill a man as quickly as a bullet, almost, and with no more noise than a fly walking on the ceiling. I've seen some of their work, and—by George, I think we're havin' company!"

Stepping noiselessly and sure-footedly as a cat on the frozen slush, a man was coming toward us. He was an undersized, emaciated fellow bundled in an overcoat much too large for him, and with a derby hat at least three sizes too big thrust incongruously down on his head. As nearly as I could determine he was dark-skinned, but I was certain that he was no Negro. For a moment he paused like a hound at fault, scanning the windows in the second story of the clubhouse, then walked unerringly to a spot beneath the partly opened window of the room where Ambergrast slept.

"Watch this," Ram Chitra Das commanded in an almost soundless whisper. "If it's what I think it'll be, it's goin' to be good."

The man came to a halt, drew a small flask from his pocket and uncorked it, letting some of its contents spill on the ground. "That's the libation," Das murmured. "They always pour a little out to Bhowanee as an offerin' before they drink the sacred mhowa as a part of ceremonial murder."

The fellow drained the contents of the flask and put the empty bottle in his pocket, then, unconcernedly as a lad about to go swimming, stripped off his overcoat, his sweater, trousers and shoes, and stood in the raw winter wind unclothed save for a loin-cloth and his absurd derby. This was last of all to come off, and we saw he wore a close-wrapped turban of soiled white cloth under it.

"*Mordieu,* he mortifies the flesh, that one," de Grandin whispered, but checked on a sharp breath as the dark-skinned man unwound a length of rope from his waist, coiled it on the frozen snow at his feet and bent above it, making swift, cryptic passes with his hands.

I knew I did not see it—yet there it was. Slowly, like a snake that wakes from torpor, the rope seemed to come alive. Its end stirred, twitched, rose a few inches, fell back to the ground, then reared once more, this time remaining up. Then inch by stealthy inch it rose, seeming to feel its way cautiously, until it stood as straight and stiff as a pole, one end upon the frozen ground, the other less than a foot from Ambergrast's window.

"*Grand Dieu des porcs,* it cannot be!" de Grandin whispered incredulously. "Me, I have heard of that rope trick a thousand times, but—"

"Seein' is believin', old chap," Ram Chitra Das cut in with a low chuckle. "You've heard old, seasoned travelers say the rope trick is a fake and can't really be done—but there it is, for you to make a note of in your diary."

The little dark man had begun to climb the upright rope. Agilely as a monkey he went up hand over hand, and it seemed to me his toes were as prehensile as a monkey's too, for instead of trying to twist his ankles in the cord to brace himself he grasped it with his feet.

He was opposite the partly opened window and was loosening the towel bound about his waist above the loin-cloth when

Das stepped quickly forward, both hands raised and shouting, *"Darwaza bundo!"* in a strident voice.

The effect was electrical. The rope collapsed like a punctured balloon, and the man grasping it was hurled to the ice-covered bricks with crushing force. Half-way between the window and the ground he twisted in the air, both arms outspread, hands clutching futilely at nothingness, mouth squared in helpless, hopeless terror, turned end over end and struck the icy pavement shoulders first.

"Grab him!" Ram Chitra Das shouted as he leaped upon the fallen body, snatched the towel from the man's hand and began to knot it into a fetter. "Don't bother," he added disgustedly, as he rose and dusted snow from his knees. "He's out cold as yesterday's kipper."

"AND that is most indubitably that," Ram Chitra Das informed us as we faced each other over coffee and sandwiches in the study. "I feared there might be several of 'em, but Sookdee Singh—our little Bagree playmate—tells me he did all those killin's by his naughty little self. Quite an enterprisin' young chap, I'd say."

"Can you put credence in his word?" de Grandin asked.

"Ordinarily, no. This time, yes. A Bagree thinks no more of lyin' than he does of breathin', but when he dips his hand in blood and says, 'May Bhwanee's wrath consume me utterly if I tell not the truth,' you can believe him. I borrowed a sponge from the hospital operatin' room and made the beggar smear his finger in the blood and swear to tell the truth before I'd make him any promises."

"But what could ye promise him, sor?" Costello demanded. "We've got dead wood on 'im. He'll take th' rap for murther, sure as shootin'—"

"I'm afraid not, Lieutenant. He was pretty badly smashed up in his fall, a fractured rib went through his lung, and the doctor at the hospital tells me he can't last the day. That gave me my hold on him."

"I don't see how—" Costello began, but the Indian continued with a smile.

"Those Criminal Tribesmen are devout Hindus, although the ethics of their devotion may be open to question. However, they share one thing with their more honest co-religionists. They feel it a disgrace to be buried, cremation bein' the only honorable method of disposin' of their bodies. If their ashes are committed to the Ganges they are just that much nearer heaven—somethin' like a Christian's bein' buried in consecrated ground, you know.

"That's where I got my leverage. I promised him that if he told the truth and the whole truth—if he 'came clean', I believe is the way you Americans would put it—I'd see his body was cremated and his ashes shipped to India to be thrown in the Ganges. I couldn't have offered him any greater inducement."

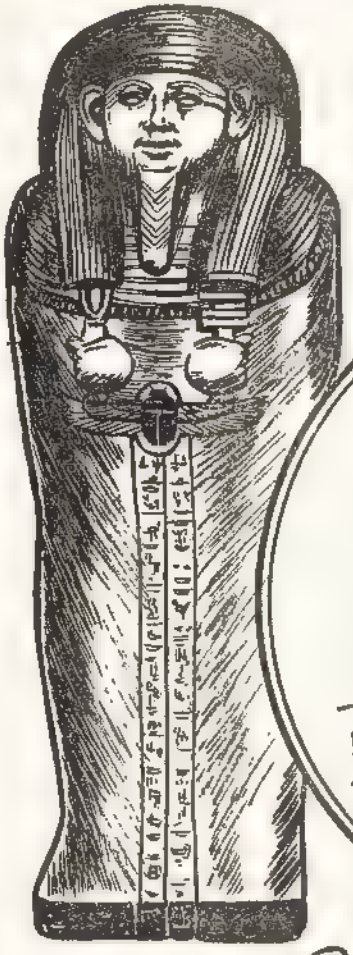
"If it's not a trade secret, would you mind telling me what it was you shouted to make that rope collapse?" I asked.

"Not at all. I said *'Darwaza bundo!'* which means merely 'Shut the door!' in Hindustani. It didn't really matter what I said, you know. In order to perform his tricks an adept has to concentrate his whole mind on them, and the slightest deviation—even for a second—breaks the charm. The shock of hearing himself suddenly addressed in his native tongue was so great that it diverted his attention. Only for a split-second, of course, but that was enough. Once the rope went soft, there was nothin' he could do about it till he had it coiled upon the ground once more and started his charm from the beginnin'."

"Mon brave!" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "My old and peerless one, *mon homme sensé. Parbleu*, I damn think next to Jules de Grandin you are the cleverest man alive! Come, let us drink to that!"

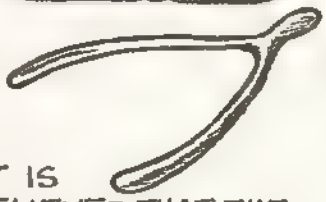
Superstitions and Taboos

By Weill

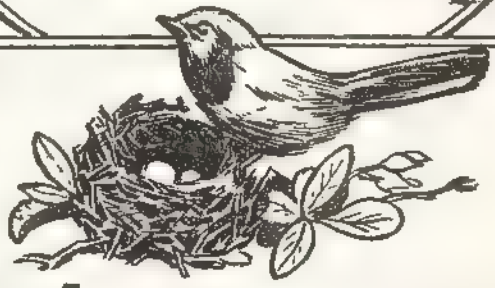


THE EGYPTIANS REGARDED THE BEETLE AS A SYMBOL OF IMMORTALITY AND THEREFORE PLACED IT ON MUMMIES *AS A SIGN OF THE* **RESURRECTION**

PRIMITIVE PEOPLES BELIEVED FLOWERS WERE SYMBOLIC OF FEMALE SEX ENERGY. THE LOTUS WAS ESPECIALLY REGARDED BY THE ANCIENTS AS THE SIGN OF THE MOTHER, THE **FEMALE CREATOR**

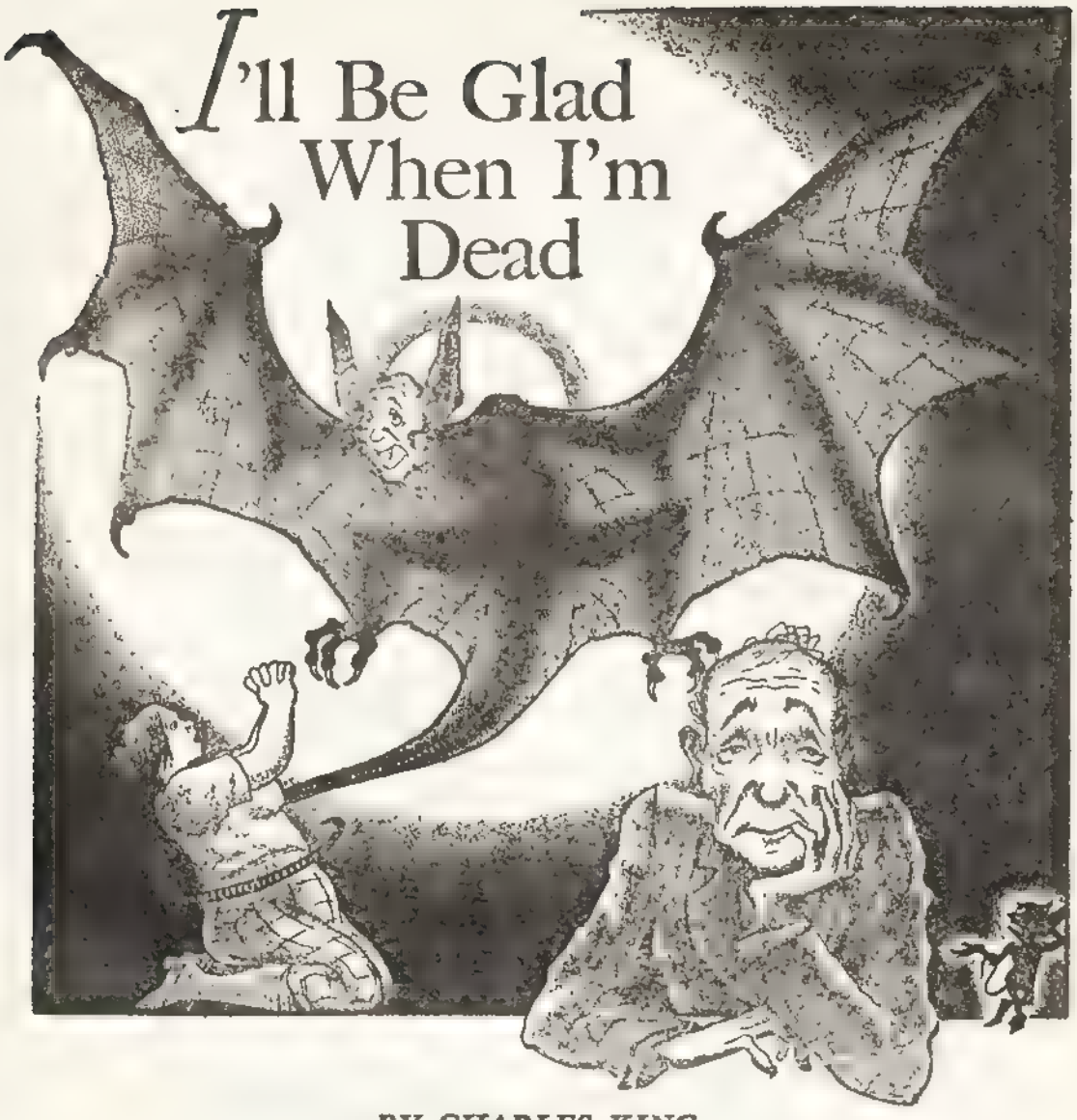


IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE FIRST MAN TO ENTER A ROOM BY A DOOR OVER WHICH A WISHBONE IS PLACED, WILL BECOME THE **HUSBAND** *OF THE GIRL WHO PUT IT THERE*



IT WAS ONCE THE CONVICTION THAT IF THE CUTTINGS OF HAIR WERE THROWN WHERE BIRDS COULD FIND THEM, THEY WOULD BE USED BY THE BIRDS TO BUILD THEIR **NESTS** THEREBY CAUSING THE FORMER OWNER *TO HAVE* **HEADACHES** *ALL THE YEAR AFTER*

I'll Be Glad When I'm Dead



BY CHARLES KING

"GET UP, you lazy bum!"

Julius didn't need an alarm clock.

"Get your skinny feet out've that bed before I clout that bald skull of yours!"

He had a wife.

"You wanna be late to work?" Then, as usual, she answered herself: "Sure! There's prob'ly nothin' better you'd like than to take the roof offa my head and the food outa my mouth."

Julius agreed. But, being a hundred and seventeen pounds against his wife's one hundred and ninety, he kept his generous assent a deep secret.

"Get up!"

The little runt was going to revenge himself upon a world loaded with oversized enemies

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Squirming unhappily out of bed. Julius perched on the edge a moment. Gradually, his small, vaguely colored eyes focussed downward. No getting away from it, he brooded unhappily, his feet were skinny.

Slewing sideways, his eyes took in the bony arms that poked out of his undershirt. Though, at certain times, he fondly imagined that he was starting to put on some weight, this was an off day. He saw himself for exactly what he was . . . a skinny little runt.

And he hated it.

And he hated *them*.

Them? They were the well padded people who unconcernedly waddled through life.

They were the ones whose several chins quivered as they laughed.

They were the ones whose plump bellies shook as they walked.

They were the ones who flaunted their flesh proudly . . . the flesh which Julius didn't possess.

So he hated.

"AWRIGHT, awright, slow poke. I don't wanna stay over the sink all day. Feed your face and scram."

"Yes, m'dear," mumbled Julius as he hastily swallowed a scratchy piece of burnt toast. Then, squashing his hat atop his head, he fled to the outside world.

Nobody gave the forlorn, shabby little man a second glance as he mooched down the street. They would have done much more than that, however, if they could have read his morbid thoughts. For Julius was engrossed in his favorite occupation: reducing all fleshy hulks to dried up, wizened specimens such as himself. His methods were quite grisly.

He was three minutes late for work that morning. His boss—a two hundred pounder, of course—didn't let Julius forget it all day. The daily kicking around, which he had grown to accept as a part of his miserable job, was, this day, excruciatingly enhanced by the blobby behemoth who paid his salary. By the day's end Julius was almost witless with helpless rage. As he slammed from the office into the street he hardly knew where he was heading.

What made it that much worse was that his bony hands were completely tied. There was nothing he could do—absolutely nothing. If he spoke up to his Boss that bulbous bully would flatten him on the spot with painful promptness . . . and then fire him. And his wife. Oh, his ever loving wife. When she got her beefy paws on him that would be the end. He'd be a dead pigeon, for certain.

Now, there is a definite group of men who revert to childlike actions when they are under severe strain of temper. Some of them wave their arms wildly as they rant and bellow; others, frenetic with fury, clench their fists and hop up and down in paroxysms of vocally silenced rage.

Julius belonged to both groups . . . and to neither. Internally he churned with a violence that was unbelievable in its sheer fury; externally he presented the front of a pallid, little character with curiously strained features.

But there is always a breaking point—and today was it. He was going to revenge himself upon a world loaded with fat enemies. He entered a small stationery store, made a quick, unobtrusive purchase, and then darted around the corner to where there was an empty lot. Then he took the machinery for his vengeance out of his pocket.

A box of chalk.

Then, squatting on his heels, he drew, upon a slab of concrete walk, the two symbols designating both sexes of the lumpish, corpulent people that he envied and loathed . . . his Wife and his Boss. They represented, to him, all *the others*.

If he had been a good artist—if he had been *any* sort of an artist—it wouldn't have happened. The egregious part of it was that he couldn't draw at all. What he fondly hoped was the faces of his enemy symbols were merely childish distortions.

Angles and curves overlapped without any harmonic lines or perspective, presenting a veritable distortion of ungoverned traceries. Still, nothing would have happened if he hadn't completed his job so thoroughly.

UNDERNEATH what would have been unrecognizable to any one but himself, he scrawled every nasty obscenity he

could pluck from the stilled vocabulary of years. From the chalk in his hand rolled all the pent-up viciousness that had been contained so long; viciousness which had grown by feeding and festering upon itself.

The completion of his destiny was simplicity itself. He lit a cigarette and tossed the flaming match into the center of his drawn and written depravities.

"Well?"

Shocked surprise rode across Julius' face as he spun around. Where *had* that squeaking voice come from?

"Damn it, I haven't got all day! Well?"

He looked around again. Nothing there. Sweat coursed freely down his face. Had he become subject to squeaking hallucinations? He looked down. *He looked down.* There it was . . . in his vest pocket.

"Well?" queried the single-eyed crimson little horror poking its head out of his pocket. "D'you think I have all day? Ask me what you want—and hurry up!"

Somehow Julius found what was left of his voice: "Who . . . what . . . are you?"

"Oh, oh," moaned the red mite, "did I get called away from a bit of the most gratifying torturing it has been my lot to administer in centuries . . . called away just to answer the stupid questions of a moron human?"

"B-but . . . b-but . . ."

"Stop repeating yourself. Don't you realize that the precise curves and angles of the figures you drew—coupled with the obscenities and the burning match—called me up to you?"

"Then—"

"Of course! Your combined acts geared together to form a spell. You're entitled to one wish, stupid, and I wish you'd get the lead out of your baggy pants."

Slowly . . . torturously . . . the enormity of what had happened enveloped the bulging-eyed Julius. His voice came in whistling gasps: "You . . . you are . . ."

"*A Demon.* And now will you *please* hurry."

WHIRLING worlds, with Julius as their core, came to a sudden, jarring, rending stop. The still, small voice of caution forced itself through his accustomed cloak of timorousness. "But I always thought . . . read . . . that demons were large—with horns and forked tails—and . . ."

"Shut *up,* you misbegotten human," squalled the raging horror. "Did you ever *see* a demon?"

"I only meant . . ."

"Quiet, damn your human soul! You used a vest pocket size spell and got a vest pocket sized demon. Anything wrong with that?"

"No . . . *wait!* Did you say I get a wish? *Any* wish?"

The other shuddered. "Questions, questions. I'll go mad. Yes, dope, you get any wish. Only hurry—I've got *work* to do."

Julius seemed to gain sudden height. "All right, I've got a wish."

"Yes?"

"I want to be a vampire!"

"Mm-mm. Interesting. If you'll pardon my demonic curiosity, I'd appreciate knowing just why."

For perhaps the first time in his life Julius spoke surely. The words came steadily: "All my life I've hated fat people. They pick on me—remind me of what I am—"

"You are a rather sad specimen," observed the other.

"I want to get back at them . . . cut them down to my size. . . ."

The other nodded. "I quite see your point. By returning as a vampire and sucking their blood you'll cut their weight down."

"Exactly," Julius agreed happily.

"Of course, though, you will have to die first. Only way it can be done, you know."

"But—but—you'll definitely bring me back?"

"As a vampire? Oh yes. The spell guarantees you one wish . . . and you'll get it."

"Then," smiled Julius, "I'll be glad when I'm dead."

"Wait, human, are you sure?"

"You—you're not backing out on me, are you?"

"Dope! Certainly not! It's just that . . . well . . . in all my centuries I've never seen such a miserable specimen as yourself. What I'm trying to say, human, is that I'm *sorry* for you."

Julius' voice rose shrilly: "You're tricking me . . . trying to cheat me. . . ."

"No, human, it's merely the first authenticated case of a demon trying to help anybody."

"Lies—broken promise—" the skinny man's voice died away to a despairing gurgle.

"Very well, then, and stop that lousy snivelling. Only don't forget that I warned you. I'm a vest pocket size demon, and my spells . . ."

Julius broke in eagerly, as if afraid the other would change its mind. "Let's go to my house and get it over with."

Muttering something about "Vest pocket size and spells having to balance," the demon grumpily subsided.

Julius lay down, in his house, but asked one last question before he died.

"Don't worry," spat the demon in answer, "you'll come back and drink blood . . . damned, dopey, human fool!"

THE awakening was sudden. Julius knew he was alive. Things were slightly blurred . . . there seemed a limitless expanse of space about him . . . but he was alive. And he was *flying*. Good old demon. He'd more than kept his promise. This was great.

Flying . . . *look!* An enormous blob of flesh beneath him. What a lovely beginning. What a wonderful subject to practice upon. Careful now . . . land softly. Ah. His first victim was a veritable giant, extending away in amazing manner. But no time to puzzle over that now. *Drink.*

Funny . . . very funny. Not the taste of the blood. No, that was good. But he had found out something. Vampires do *not* sink needle-sharp teeth into their victims' necks. All wrong. False. What they do is insert an incredibly sharp nose and . . .

Look. Run!

Grotesquely shaped like a mammoth starfish, a fleshy appendage was swinging down with horrifying speed. Run . . . fly . . . *splat!*

Punctuating the night with her steady snoring, Julius' wife turned over, her hand dropping off the side of the bed.

And, on the floor, a mashed mosquito quivered once . . . twice . . . and lay still.

The Cinnabar Redhead

By ***HAROLD LAWLOR***

SHE was standing at the side of the Canyon Road when Byron Kane first saw her. Her hand flashed up in an urgent signal for him to stop, and he turned his spotlight upon her as he slowed, for the hour was late and anything could happen on the Canyon Road.

But her appearance looked innocent enough, judging from what he could see. No fear of a hold-up, certainly. It was one of those deceptively mild November nights common in that part of the country, but even so she had a blonde mink coat slung carelessly over her shoulders, cape-fashion, the arms dangling emptily. Her throat and her ear-lobes were ablaze with jewels, her dark red hair piled high, and the hem of her emerald-green evening dress, slit to the knee in front, was lost in the wisps of trailing fog that drifted like tattered gray chiffon close to the ground.

Byron braked to a stop, stepped out. It was only then that he saw the great black coupé beyond her, like a monstrous streamlined beetle, overturned in the ditch where it had crashed through the white-painted guard rail. Its wheels were still spinning impotently in the air, heightening its resemblance to an insect trying vainly to get back on its feet.

Good God! How had the girl ever survived such a crash? There wasn't a mark on her. Nevertheless, "Are you hurt?" Byron asked. "Can I—"

"Yes. No. My injuries do not matter. It's you. Listen!" she said urgently, coming closer. "I feel that I must warn you—"

"Warn?" Byron said. And he actually said, "Who, me?" Why should she be warning him when she was so obviously the one in need of help? And then he thought he understood. It was a common enough phe-

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

Anything can happen on Canyon Road—and does!

nomenon. The girl was suffering from shock. Perhaps she'd even incurred a slight brain concussion, which was why she was talking so disconnectedly. He slipped an arm around her, tried to lead her to his car.

But she pulled away, and her hazel eyes blazed at him. "I'm all *right,* I tell you! It's you. I want you to promise me that you'll never again travel the Canyon Road. It's dangerous for you!"

"But—but—" Byron faltered, bewildered. This was preposterous! He was beginning to feel absurdly like a young man in an Oppenheim novel. He'd never seen this girl before in his life. And as for the Canyon Road, he traveled it almost nightly, returning to his home, and while it was lonely and sparsely enough traveled, it was hardly sinister. Certainly it could carry no menace for him. But now—

The girl was clutching his lapel, impotently trying to shake him in her exigency. "Promise me!" she almost hissed it. "Then go."

"But I can't leave you here alone. You're wearing a fortune in jewels. Your coat, your car—" He heard himself growing incoherent. This wouldn't do. He said more calmly, "Come, we'll get help."

"I tell you I'm *beyond* help!" She gestured helplessly. "Oh, if I could only make you understand! If you'll just—" She broke off, bent her head in a listening attitude. "There's someone coming."

BYRON heard it too. Loose pebbles in the road, kicked heedlessly by careless feet approaching. Together he and the girl stood there and watched the road. Presently the figure of an elderly gentleman was revealed in the headlights of Byron's car. A quiet old gentleman, dressed in decent black —ordinary enough, you would say. And yet, there was something about him—

He didn't speak. He made no offer to help. He just stood there, looking at the girl. And he shook his head, slowly back and forth, and clucked pityingly. Then, still without a word, he turned and continued to trudge down the road.

It was—peculiar.

Byron looked at the girl. "Who was that? He seemed to know you."

She shook her head. Almost she seemed to cower within the shelter of her coat. "I—don't know. He—frightened me."

Byron took a few steps forward. "Say!" he called after the retreating figure of the old man. "There's been an accident here. Aren't you going to help? Hey, *you!"*

The old man paid him no heed, and presently his figure disappeared entirely into the fog. Byron felt a strange sense of chill in the small of his back. He turned to the girl.

It was then that the oddest thing of all happened.

She appeared to blur before his eyes. Her outlines seemed to be dissolving. Byron shut his eyes, perforce, as one does to ward off dizziness. And when he opened them again, there was nothing there.

No girl. No car. Nothing but his own car remained, just where he'd parked it at the side of the road.

He stood there, blinking his eyes stupidly. He wasn't dreaming, he hadn't been drinking. Even if the girl could have hidden in the fog, how could some two tons of automobile vanish? They *couldn't* be gone—the girl and the overturned coupé. Yet they were.

It was very strange. It was—eerie. The foggy night. The hush. The mystery.

Some of the fog seemed to rise then and drift icily up his spine. He shivered apprehensively—the sort of shiver, he remembered, that makes you laugh nervously and say, "Someone must be walking over my grave."

Why was he thinking of graves? Gruesome. He groped for the door handle of his car, reassuringly damp and cold under his shaking hand. Somehow—he never could remember very clearly just how—he managed to drive to his home.

HE SLEPT not at all that night. And he knew next day he never would forget that scene of the night before. It was one of those things that stick in your memory persuasively, no matter how you try to dismiss it from your mind. It repeated itself in his thoughts maddeningly, like a phrase from an imperfectly remembered song.

The old man. The girl. Especially the girl. Between himself and the girl, he'd sensed, there'd flowed a strong attraction. Unspoken messages leaping across a void.

They were meant to be together. Ridiculous. He'd seen her only once. But that was the way it was. That was the way he felt.

Meanwhile, he couldn't work. There was that painting he was doing for Denta Toothpaste; there was the March cover for *Metropolitan,* still unfinished. Well, and the hell with them. He had something else on his mind.

Ghosts.

After all, wasn't it the only logical explanation? If you could speak of logic in connection with such a thing? Surely the old man and the girl were people without substance?

Byron mentally made allowance for the strong strain of superstition he had inherited from an Irish grandmother who'd sent him gibbering to bed as a child on many a night, filled with deliciously terrifying tales of ghosts and goblins and the walking dead. But maybe there'd been some truth in many of those yarns.

For the first time he was sorry he lived alone, sorry he had no one with whom to talk it over. His friends had thought him mad for electing to bury himself out here in the country. A bachelor, young, moneyed, popular, handsome enough. "Why," they'd said aghast, "you could be surrounded with hordes of people."

And so he could. And so he had. And that was the trouble. He'd had a studio in town for a time, and it had been filled to overflowing with genial souls, dropping in endlessly. And the work he'd been able to do you could stick in your left eye, and have room for a horse besides.

Well. And he'd moved to the country. And now it was ghosts interfering with his work.

Good God, life was full of problems!

By three o'clock he'd kidded himself out of believing in ghosts. By four o'clock he was sure he'd dreamed it all last night. By five o'clock he was quite cheerful, singing in the shower, preparing to leave for town.

And, he thought, shrugging into his dinner jacket, he was going and returning by way of the Canyon Road.

"See, fella!" he scowled at his image in the mirror. The scowl grew terrific as he made a pass at his mirrored self. "Yeah, you!"

Ghosts, my eye.

But he knew his skepticism for the hollow pretense it was. He knew why he'd be returning by the Canyon Road. Not from disbelief. Not from bravado. No. But because he'd be hoping to see again—a ghost, a red-headed ghost with hazel eyes.

You could always dream, couldn't you?

MARCATTI and Ebsen, the duo-pianists, were playing at Orchestra Hall, and he'd promised to take Isobel. Not that it was romance with Isobel. He usually thought of her as "good old Isobel." But it was pleasant enough companionship.

At dinner beforehand he was tempted to tell her of the mink-coated redhead. But Isobel, he knew, would only feel of her pale-blonde back hair, fix him with her pale-blue eyes. "Where did she go to school?" Isobel would probably ask, speaking in her slightly nasal, well-bred voice. And when from ignorance he couldn't answer, she'd say with just the right touch of indifferent rue, "I'm afraid I really do not know her."

Limbo for the mink-coated redhead.

So he said nothing. But he saw that though the imagined dialogue never took place, perversely enough it annoyed him with Isobel. Annoyed him intensely. Almost at once he saw the reason for his absurd irritation. The realization enlightened him mightily, startled him.

He was deeply in love with a red-headed ghost!

Marcatti and Ebsen, later, were not at their best, but they were good enough. You could sit there, your eyes closed, letting the music beat against your ears. You could toy with the idea of the trip home along the Canyon Road. You didn't have to go that way, you knew. You could take Route 56, and cut across through Denham. It was only a little longer. You could have quite a little argument with yourself, sitting there in Orchestra Hall, knowing full well all the while, you were going home by the Canyon Road, come hell or high water.

Because, though she'd warned you away, there was a girl with red hair whom you might see again. A girl whose painted mouth lured you on, whose eyes stirred you strangely.

As Isobel's never had.

HE DROPPED Isobel at her house, accepted her cool kiss. Then he set out for home, with the feeling that the evening was just beginning.

Where the Canyon Road branched off from Route 56, he stopped the car. Which way should he go, he debated, tantalizing himself. He sat there about five minutes pondering the question, prolonging the suspense knowingly, laughing at himself inwardly the while. He'd done this sort of thing ever since he'd been a child—made the most of every anticipated moment. Quite unconsciously he'd learned to be an artist in living.

When the five minutes had elapsed, he pulled the gearshift into low and started down the Canyon Road, just as he'd known in his heart he would do.

He prepared himself for disappointment. She wouldn't be there, of course. That would be too much to hope. But paradoxically if she weren't there, it would be all right, too. At least, he'd know he wasn't going out of his mind. Either way, how could he lose? He laughed shortly at this whimsy.

And then he stopped laughing.

She was there. Her hand flashed up in an urgent signal for him to stop, and he turned his spotlight upon her as he slowed, for the hour was late and anything could happen on the Canyon Road.

The blonde mink coat clung over her shoulders. The emerald-green dress. Beyond her the overturned car, like a beetle in its death throes.

The scene was the same.

Again he felt himself sliding out of his own car, heard himself asking, "Are you hurt? Can I—"

Again she said, "Yes. No. My injuries do not matter. It's you. Listen! I feel that I must warn you—"

It was like a broken record, repeating the same phrase endlessly. You had to stop this. You had to hold onto your sanity with both hands. You had to say something different, to change the scene, however slightly. Or you'd go mad.

He said, "What does this mean? This is the same scene as last night. You're saying the same thing."

Her eyes widened. Her right hand caught her coat at the throat. She seemed to shiver. "I don't know what you mean. I've never seen you before in my life."

He *wasn't* asleep. He *wasn't* imagining things. The door handle was cold under his touch. The fog was getting into his lungs, making him cough slightly. She *was* standing there, her hazel eyes watching him intently.

He mustn't grow excited, he mustn't lose control. He said carefully, "You stopped me just like this last night. You warned me not to travel the Canyon Road."

She backed a step in alarm. "How—how did you know that was what I was going to say? Warn you not to come this way again?"

He said patiently, "But I've just told you! You said the same thing last night."

"I don't know why you're lying to me. I wasn't here before." Again she caught his lapel. "But you must believe me. It's dangerous for you to come this way again."

This sort of thing could go on forever, while the moon shone down brightly. He swallowed. He tried to sort out the crazy words, phrases, sentences running through his mind, to reshape them so that this time they would make convincing sense and this girl would stop—

"Sh!" She broke in on his thoughts.

He knew what was coming without even listening. Loose gravel rattled in the road, and again the old man was there in the glare of the headlights. As before, he ignored Byron and looked sadly at the girl.

And Byron thought with a part of his mind, "I must focus my attention on something concrete, so that I can be sure later on this isn't a dream."

There wasn't much. The moonlit road. The old man, the girl. The black car, like many another, overturned in the ditch. But —*yes!* The license number. 223-223, this state. It was almost his own telephone number repeated. He could easily remember.

He looked up at the old man then, and said woodenly, "There's been an accident."

The old man stared straight past him at the girl. This time he spoke. He shook his head regretfully. "It's no use, my dear. I've told you that before. It really isn't any use at all."

The girl cowered, perhaps more in perplexity than fear. The old man started

trudging away. Byron broke from this weird lethargy that had him in its grasp. He followed a few steps after the old man. "Say, what is—"

But, wait! This was the same mistake he'd made last night! He wheeled to face the girl. And then it happened again. The whole scene blurred. He struggled valiantly to fight back the haze before his eyes, but when he could see clearly again, the girl and the car were gone.

He stood there blinking dazedly. Then with shaking hands, he opened the door of his car, and got in. He sat there a long, long time, his elbows on the steering wheel, his head in his hands, staring blindly ahead down the deserted Canyon Road.

It is not a pleasant thing to reflect that one is going insane.

STRANGELY enough, he slept that night. The nervous sleep of exhaustion. But in the morning he felt as if he'd had no rest at all.

It was raining, a steady drizzle, depressing enough to the spirits under even the best conditions. But as Byron watched his shaking hands as he poured out his coffee, he knew this could not go on. His nerves were shot. The unknown, the inexplicable, he'd never faced them before. They added nothing to one's mental tranquillity.

Perhaps he could allay this mental torment if only he had someone with whom to talk, a logical earthly someone who could point out a plausible reason for these things he'd been seeing. Mentally he reviewed the list of his acquaintances, rejecting them one by one. Good lads, all of them, but not what he wanted.

It was some time before he remembered John Francis Murry, whom he knew only slightly. Murry, the criminal lawyer. Cerebral, unimaginative, astringent, no harborer of superstitions.

To think of Murry was to dive for the shower, the closet, the car. It was to see at last some faint ray of hope for help.

MURRY leaned back in his swivel chair, let cigar ash drift sloppily onto his paunch.

"Huh," he wheezed. He half-shut his eyes sleepily, a habit of his when his brain was at its sharpest. "Thing I don't see," he grunted, "is why you came to me. A psychiatrist is your best bet, I'd say."

Byron had paced to the window nervously, fiddled with the string of the shade after telling his story. Now angrily he let the shade roll up to the top with a noisy zip.

"A psychiatrist!" he scoffed. "He'd tell me I was seeing the girl because I hated my parents because I was frightened by a caterpillar at the age of three!"

Murry chuckled briefly. "Well, maybe."

"*You* don't think I'm crazy?" Byron challenged.

"They call me the guy with the open mind," Murry said blandly. "Have you any theory about this scene you've been seeing?"

There was an armless chair facing Murry's desk. Byron turned it around, straddled it, leaned his arms along its back. "I read a story once—" He broke off, grinned sheepishly. "You'll surely think I'm crazy now. But I believe there was a wreck there. The girl was killed. She's a ghost. For some reason she's coming back, trying to warn me of some imminent danger. God knows why."

"You're sure you didn't dream the whole thing, both times?"

"Sure, I'm sure!" Byron said indignantly. "I saw everything as plain as your face. Why, I even noted the license number of her car! 223-223, this state, '46."

"Huh." Murry reached for the telephone and dialed a number. "Gimme the Accident Bureau—no, I *don't* know what extension, *get it!*" he barked irritably. He waited seconds then for someone named Callahan. "Mike? Any record of a fatal accident this year on Canyon Road where it crosses Cobanga Canyon, redhead girl killed, driving black Lincoln coupé, this year's license number 223-223?"

He listened a minute. "Well, call me back, will you, when you know?"

Byron and Murry made desultory conversation then for fifteen minutes, but at the end of that time, Byron couldn't have repeated a word of what they'd said. He sat there nervously on his chair, listening with only a part of his mind, and he jumped when the telephone finally rang.

Murry said thickly through the cigar, "An old couple injured there two years ago, and

no accidents since? Thanks, Mike. What? Oh, you did? It *does?* Huh! Thanks again, Mike."

Murry hung up, placed the phone very carefully at the side of his desk. "All right," he said then, leaning back comfortably. "What's the gag?"

"Gag?"

"The angle." Murry wiggled his thick fingers. "So you want to meet her, too, huh? Well, I can't blame you. Every guy in town does. Though this is a screwy way you're going about it."

Byron said tensely, "I don't know what you're talking about. If you've found out anything about that dead girl, tell me, and cut out the clowning."

Murry blinked. "Dead girl, my foot. The black Lincoln, license 223-223, belongs to Miss Fleury Lennon, torch-singer, who's knocking 'em dead nightly at the Cinnabar Café. If she's dead, she's the liveliest corpse I ever saw. I heard her there last night, and the night before, myself. At just about the times you say she stopped you on the Canyon Road. So now what?"

Byron rubbed his forehead. "So now I've got to find out what it's all about before I go completely crazy."

IT WAS a night club like a thousand others, the Cinnabar Café. The smoke-laden atmosphere hit your lungs with the impact of a blow. Fireflies would have been brighter than the lights on the walls discreetly biting the gloom at intervals. You sat in almost Stygian darkness until ten o'clock, when a baby "spot" made a bright golden circle to frame Miss Fleury Lennon.

You weren't surprised to learn that she was good. She had to be, at five dollars *couvert.* She'd never sing at La Scala, perhaps, but she was fine in the Cinnabar Café. She sang huskily, throatily, of love good and bad. Of lovers gone, missed or forgotten. The usual thing. But she made you care intensely about her chanted troubles. When she was finished, and you applauded, she stood there looking at you coolly.

She sauntered off the floor to the dressing rooms, the baby "spot" following her insolent swivel-hipped step till she disappeared, as if it too were loath to see her go.

Byron stopped beating his palms together and signaled the head-waiter.

"I want to meet Miss Lennon." He showed a folded wad of bills discreetly. "It's really important."

The waiter hesitated, but not for long. "I think it can be managed." He palmed the bills suavely. "Follow me, sir."

Away from the smoke, away from the dimness. A brightly lighted hall that hurt your eyes by contrast. A white-painted door flaunting a golden star.

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Lennon," said the waiter through the panels. "He says it's important."

"Just a minute." Then, "Show him in."

They entered, then the waiter withdrew. She was sitting on a tufted velvet *pouf,* eyeing him in the mirror the while she applied fresh lipstick with a little brush. Byron waited for some sign of recognition. None came.

This was the first time he'd really had a good look at her in a bright light. She was a little older than he'd thought. Her left eyelid, through some muscular fault, drooped very slightly in what should have been sinister fashion. Perversely enough, it only added to her attractiveness. And of her personal magnetism he hadn't been mistaken. You felt it like a challenge.

But he couldn't stand here staring like this all night. He said deliberately. "I want to know why you've been warning me away from the Canyon Road."

She put the lipstick brush down. Her eyes widened, met his in the mirror. "Warning you away from—? My dear Mr.—"

"Kane. Byron Kane. The last two nights you've stopped me on the Canyon Road, and told me never to travel that way again." Quickly he explained the two scenes of the nights before.

She turned around, and her eyes never left his face till he finished. Then she smiled very slightly, a little wearily. "Well. I thought I'd heard them all. But this is certainly a new approach."

Byron smiled too, but grimly. "At any other time I'd knock myself out to meet you. I admit it. But tonight I'm telling you the truth. Look, I've met you, I've gained my purpose if that was what I'd come for. Why should I persist in the lie now—if it were a lie?"

Evidently she saw the logic of this. Her smile faded. "The strangest thing of all is that you should mention the Canyon Road. I haven't traveled it in over a year. But I have to take it tonight."

Now he was warning her, half-laughing at himself in his mind at the absurdity of the reversal. "Don't take it tonight. Go some other way."

He was surprised to find himself shivering. Damn it, he meant the warning. He felt a queer sense of foreboding.

But Fleury only shook her head. "My sister is very ill. I have to go to Antioch, and there is no other road."

It was ridiculous, insane, that they should both be taking this so seriously. It was utterly meaningless. And yet—

"Why are you afraid of the old man in the road?" Byron asked.

"I've told you. I wasn't there. I've never seen him." She stood up. "I really don't know what you're talking about. I've never seen you before in my life, believe me, but still—" She looked at him. "I'm afraid."

Maybe she was lying to him. She didn't seem to be, but how could he tell for certain? After all, he scarcely knew her.

"You really must excuse me now." She looked at the clock. "I ought to be leaving."

There seemed nothing for him to gain by remaining. Byron took his leave—a curious, stilted sort of leave-taking, as if they were both embarrassed by their intensity over such nonsense as they'd just been exchanging. But their eyes clung, strangely loath to part.

At the door he said, "I think we'll meet again."

And she said softly, "Yes. I have a feeling—"

Of that much, at least, he was sure.

HE RETRIEVED his car from the parking lot, drove around to the entrance of the café, and parked some ten yards from the canopied entrance.

Rain was falling again, and it was colder.

The doorman sauntered over, his slicker shining wetly. "You can't park here, sir. It's a cab-stand."

Byron handed him a bill. "It will be for only a very few minutes."

The doorman said, "Okay, sir. I think I can fix it."

He'd just regained his post when a black coupé swept up silently and stopped before the canopy. A uniformed attendant stepped out just as Fleury Lennon came slowly from the café. She was wearing the costume Byron remembered from the last two nights, even to the mink coat slung carelessly over her shoulders.

Byron pulled his snap-brim low, slumped down in the seat, his heart pounding. His eyes never left the license number under the taillight of the car before him. 223-223. It was the black Lincoln coupé.

Fleury said something to the doorman, then got into the car, sliding over behind the wheel. Byron started his motor, and followed the coupé as it pulled away from the curb.

Once on Highway 56, the Lincoln pulled slowly, inexorably away. Byron pushed his little car to the utmost, but he lost the coupé long before the junction of 56 and the Canyon Road. The last he saw of it through the rain, its taillights winked at him sardonically like widespread ruby eyes.

HE STOPPED where the roads forked, surveying the emptiness of the Canyon Road before him. He told himself he was a fool. He ought to turn right on 56. Call it instinct, superstition, sixth sense, what you would. Everything told him to turn to the right.

But he knew he wouldn't. He could not.

Whatever it all meant, he and the girl belonged together. He'd known it that first night. He thought she'd recognized the same thing herself tonight. It was in her eyes. It was in her calm acceptance of what was, after all, his preposterous story.

He wasn't smiling tonight as he shifted into first, pointed the hood of his car down the Canyon Road. The scene of the past two nights would be repeated, he felt. But with a difference. This time he meant to see that she didn't vanish. He meant to understand the mystery.

He slowed as he approached Cobanga Canyon, and his hand switched on the spotlight.

She wasn't in the road.

For a minute he felt a sick wave of disappointment. And then his heart leaped. He saw the skid marks on the wet pavement.

His hand jerked the spotlight, swept it over the ditch beyond.

His breath caught hurtingly.

There it was. The car. Overturned. But where was she?

Again something, like a warning bell in his mind, told him not to stop, to sweep on. But he stopped. He got out, gingerly approached the overturned coupé.

And that was where he found Fleury. Inside the car. Crumpled in the twisted wreckage. Dead.

Somehow, he eased the body out, laid it gently on the ground. But all the while his soul was raging impotently that such senseless destruction of a lovely thing could be. It was like seeing an irreplaceable object of art broken in a futile, pointless fit of temper. Was this the way it had to end? Tenderly he pulled the mink coat about her, she who'd never feel the cold again. And he covered her face with his handkerchief.

Through his grief, he knew dully he'd have to go for someone. Fleury was beyond help, but— Wait! He listened. Far off, approaching on the little-traveled Canyon Road, he could hear the high whine of a speeding car. He could stop them, send them for help.

He caught up a flashlight from the glove compartment of his own car, ran to the center of the road. Headlights swept around a curve in the road, rushed down upon him. He waved the flashlight madly. The car hurtled toward him. Didn't the fools see him? Weren't they going to stop?

It was too late to leap aside, to cry out. You threw up your hands, but you couldn't hold back tons of onrushing metal and death. The right front fender of the car struck you sickeningly. You buckled. You were hurled aside like a bag of grain. You lay there at the road's edge, your limbs bent at crazy angles, jagged red streaks of pain etching themselves against the black of your waning consciousness.

Then—nothing.

The hit-run driver slowed momentarily, then sped on to his own private hell.

WHEN Byron came to, Fleury was standing before him.

He blinked, then sprang to his feet with a glad cry. His hand went out to her eagerly. "Fleury! I thought you'd been kil—"

Something was wrong! His breath caught sharply. His hand had gone *through* her shoulder!

She smiled faintly at the expression of horror on his face. "I know. I've already discovered for myself. Look." She placed her hand on his arm. It passed right through.

He stood there staring stupidly from his arm to her face. Then he looked around. They were on a road, a long, long road that stretched to the horizon and beyond, that stretched to infinity. A road that was not the Canyon Road.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "But I remember everything else now. So much is clear. I know now why I warned you away from the Canyon Road. Some part of me—apart from my conscious self—knew this was going to happen, and tried to prevent it. I was powerless to save myself, for some reason, but I tried to save you."

"You mean we're—we're—?" He couldn't say the word.

"*Dead.*" She said it for him.

For a minute terror held him. It took a bit of getting used to—this idea that he was no more. And then he looked at Fleury. Fleury was with him. At least he was not alone. Fleury. He smiled. He said slowly, gratefully, "It—why, it isn't going to be so bad!"

She slipped her hand in his. Her eyes were soft and shining. "Not so very bad," she agreed.

And then they both heard it. The sound of shuffling footsteps coming nearer on the road.

"It's the old man," Fleury whispered. Her hand tightened on Byron's. "Strange, I don't fear even him any more."

The old man stopped when he saw them. He smiled gently. Seen up closer, he was not at all alarming. "You see, my dear?" he said. "I told you it wasn't any use. It wasn't any use at all. Would you change things now, if you could? Of course not. Come."

Byron said, "But you. Who are *you?*"

As they fell into step beside him, the old man told them, "Sometimes they call me Kismet. And sometimes they call me Fate."

And then in silence the three of them went happily down the road to nowhere.

The Shingler

By E. L. WRIGHT

"WE'RE almost there boys," I said as I steered the old jalopy off the main highway onto an apparently long unused lane, a lane overgrown with weeds. It was difficult keeping the old buggy in the tracks. It jounced up and down, but we kept on going.

My six-year-old brother, Tommy, was having a fine time. We were scouts on the lookout for Indians. "There's one, Louie. Behind that tree. I'll get him. *Bang.*" He brought an imaginary rifle up to his shoulder and fired. He settled back, satisfied. "I got him."

"Think we can go fishing—maybe catch some fish for supper?" eagerly queried Bill, my in-between brother.

"I think so," I answered with adult im-

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

Shingling this lodge was his job and no one else could do it—ever!

portance. I was remembering my mother's thousand-and-one instructions covering this week's outing. At first she had been reluctant for us to go. But Dad had talked her out of it.

"After all," Dad had said, "isn't Louie practically a man? It'll do him good . . . having the responsibility of looking after Tommy and Bill."

So Mom had agreed.

Personally, my only worry was that Tommy would get homesick and want to return home after a day or two.

Right now he was the liveliest of the trio. "There it is," he shouted. "Boy, oh boy!"

Ahead lay the lodge my boss had practically insisted on my using when he heard I had no definite plans for my vacation other than camping out for a week. I had protested, but Mr. Cabot exclaimed: "Nonsense, my boy, it'll be almost the same as camping out. I'm afraid the lodge isn't in every good shape—we haven't used it in years. Belonged to my wife's grandfather."

I brought the car to a halt.

Tommy was out immediately, prancing about.

"Looks like Mr. Cabot was right," I remarked to Bill as I surveyed the scene before us.

The weatherbeaten lodge, a low rambling affair, sprawled between tall pines, the foliage so dense the sky above was scarcely visible. A veritable wilderness.

"The door's open," yelled Tommy from the lodge door. He disappeared inside.

I shrugged, stuffed the key back in my pocket, got out of the car and stretched my legs. Bill started loading his arms with camping paraphernalia.

"We won't take anything in till we've cleaned the joint up a bit," I told him.

THE lodge was indeed in a bad state of disrepair. The hinges on the door creaked rustily. At our every step the floor boards groaned.

"Hope it doesn't rain." Bill cast an anxious eye at the ceiling. "Doesn't look as if anyone's been here in a thousand years."

"Not quite that long," I retorted.

A loud resounding crash caused us to run into one of the rooms off the main living room. Tommy, a ludicrous expression on his face, sat in the middle of what was once a bed.

"I was only testing it," he said ruefully.

"Bill and I'll do the testing around here. Good thing it didn't go clear through the floor with you." I lightly fanned his backside as he scrambled from the bed. "You come along with us where we can watch you."

"Carry me piggy-back, Louie," he begged.

So our tour of inspection was completed with my acting as beast-of-burden for Tommy.

The lodge consisted of a huge living room with a fireplace, a kitchen with a wood-burning stove, and three bedrooms.

"One for each of us," beamed Tommy.

We were standing in the third bedroom.

I looked about thoughtfully. "This looks like our best bet," I said to Bill, ignoring Tommy. "If it does rain there are fewer places for it to leak in and it'll be easier for us to fix."

"Okay," agreed Bill. "The three of us in here, huh?"

"Yeah. We can move this bed in one of the other rooms and set up our cots in here.

Tommy whined a little at sleeping in the same room, but his attention was soon diverted. As soon as we'd brought everything in from the car we'd go down to the lake and see if we could catch any fish for supper.

A little elbow grease made the lodge livable, and we were soon down by the lake.

The fish were so plentiful that even Tommy caught four without half trying.

Game was plentiful too, I noticed as we followed a path overgrown with weeds back to the lodge.

"Wish we'd brought a gun along," sighed Bill.

"Why can't we set a snare, Louie?" asked Tommy eagerly. By this time he was a thoroughly dirty little boy—but having the time of his life. "Will you help me fix a trap, Louie? Will you? Promise."

I promised. "You'd think Mr. Cabot would be up here every week-end, wouldn't

you?" I inquired of Bill, "It's a regular sportsman's paradise."

Bill shrugged. "Maybe he's an indoor man."

"Maybe so—but I can't figure out why he let the place practically decay."

Tommy had been running ahead of us, his line of fish trailing in the high weeds. Now he came tearing back, brought the fish up suddenly barely missing my face. "Can I fry my own fish? Can I, huh?"

"Yes, you can fry your own fish—and eat them too."

Satisfied, he ran ahead again.

SUPPER over, we sprawled in front of the fireplace, which we had cleaned out so it didn't smoke too badly. Tommy's eyes began to droop. Bill picked him up, carried him into the bedroom.

I yawned, looked at my watch, then pillowed my head in my arms.

A sudden rush of cold air swept over me.

Bill, stepping out for a bit of fresh air before retiring, I thought drousily.

"Hey there—close that door." I opened one eye.

The cold night air continued to flow in.

"Bill!" I called. Both eyes were open now.

No answer. The dying embers of the fire cast weird shadows about the room. The wind was rising too and the rustling trees whispered to one another.

Sitting up, I looked at my watch. Almost midnight. I'd been sleeping there almost an hour. Better hit the hay, I decided. Tommy'd be up at the crack of dawn. And that would mean no more sleep as far as Bill and I were concerned.

Wondering why Bill was remaining outdoors so long, I hoisted my hundred sixty-one pounds from the floor and lumbered to the open door. "Bill," I called, peering out into the night. "Bill!" This time a little louder. Only the sounds of the forest nightlife greeted me.

Suddenly: "What do you want?" The sleep-filled voice came from behind me.

Turning I saw Bill, clad only in his shorts, shivering in the bedroom door. I blinked, feeling rather foolish.

"Gosh, Bill, I'm sorry. The wind must've blown the door open. I thought you'd gone out." I stepped inside and firmly latched the door, then tried it to make sure Mr. Wind couldn't get in again.

"Come on to bed," Bill mumbled. His cot creaked as he flung himself down.

I BANKED the fire in the fireplace, then stripped down to my underclothes. For some reason my feet carried me over to the door. I tried it again. Satisfied, I went into the bedroom, straightened the covers over Tommy, then tumbled into my own canvas cot. A second later I was fast asleep.

The next thing I knew I was awake, listening intently for something. I raised up on one elbow.

There it was again.

A tap-tap-tap. Almost a hammering sound.

Then silence.

Silly, I told myself. Probably a branch hitting against the roof.

I lay back, closed my eyes.

Another sound—like someone walking back and forth on the roof.

I shook my head. Only a squirrel—or some tiny animal. But it didn't seem a tiny creature like a squirrel could make that much noise.

Bill slept peacefully on.

Tommy turned from side to side. Too much fish. The kid was probably having nightmares.

Then once again the tap-tapping started up.

I could stand it no longer. Separating myself from the blanket in which I was wrapped, I walked stealthily to the window, peered through into the inky blackness. There was a thin wavering light straggling through the tall trees. The moon. The tall pines swayed to and fro.

Such darned nonsense! Why couldn't I accept these noises for what they really were? But I continued to stand there, waiting for the tapping to start up.

Apparently the tapping had ceased for the night. Becoming aware of the cold, I hugged my shoulders and half-turned from the window.

A harsh rending sound caused me to leap at least three feet in the air, landing with my face up against the window. Something came hurtling down past the window

to land with a dull thud on the ground.

I must have exclaimed for Bill and Tommy both materialized at my side.

"What's up?" Bill was wide awake.

Tommy tugged at my shorts. "What is it, Louie? Let me see."

"Something fell from the roof," I said to Bill, rather foolishly.

"Cripes! Probably a pine cone or twig." Bill stuck his face against the window.

"Lift me up. I wanna see too." Tommy was insistent, and my shorts were threatening to slip over my hips. Reaching down, I lifted Tommy with one arm, swung him up to my shoulder.

The rending noise came again. This time Tommy reacted and I had to hold on with both arms to keep him from falling to the floor.

Even Bill looked startled.

A DARK shadow outside the window followed by a thud as the shadow hit the ground.

Then Bill's taut face relaxed into a grin of derision. "You've been reading too many weird tales, Louie."

"All right, mastermind, what is it?"

"Just stay put a minute and I'll show you." In a flash he was out of the bedroom, bare feet and all. Tommy quivered a little. Pulling the blanket from my cot I threw it around his shoulders.

Another minute, then Bill was back in the room, grinning derisively. "Here's your bogey man." He thrust two battered wooden shingles at me.

Tommy laughed with Bill. Taking a shingle from Bill, he began hitting me over the head with it, chanting: "Louie saw a bogey man . . . Louie saw a bogey man."

"I'll bogey-man you, young fellow." Unceremoniously, I dumped boy, shingle, blanket and all on the cot. I tried to relieve my feelings by being gruff. "You'll have to admit these surroundings are conducive to witchcraft and spook lore." I addressed Bill.

"Yeah. I know, I know." Bill took the shingle and whacked me with it. This was a signal for Tommy to begin again. The fighting was fast and furious—then I had to admit defeat. It took some time to fix up the cots again. In the wild melee mine had overturned, strewing bedclothes over the floor.

Tommy thrashed about in his cot, no longer sleepy.

Before Bill got into bed he came and stood over me, assuming a mock-serious posture. "Now let Dr. Bill feel your pulse. Hmm . . . normal. Go to sleep like a good little boy and Mr. Sandman will bring you a nice big lollipop."

I slapped his hand away.

Tommy giggled. "Feel my pulse, Bill." He bounced up and down a couple times.

Going over to Tommy, Bill went through the same routine, then tucked the blanket up around his chin.

"Maybe we can catch the squirrel on the roof, huh, Bill?" Tommy murmured happily.

"We'll catch Louie's bogey man for him," Bill said, but I ignored him.

I had acted pretty silly. Getting upset over the wind whipping shingles loose. We'd better fix them, tack them on a little more securely.

I turned on my left side, looked out of the window. The thin wavering streak of moonlight shone in. The old man in the moon was laughing at me.

A BREAKFAST of flapjacks, bacon and strong coffee. Tommy insisted on equality—so he had coffee too . . . diluted heavily with milk. This outing was a treat for him in more ways than one. I hoped we weren't spoiling him too much.

"What'll we do first?" questioned Tommy, his mouth full of bacon.

Innocently, Bill kept his eyes on his plate. "I think the first thing on the agenda will be the bedroom roof. We'd better nail those loose shingles on more securely or your big brother Louie'll be having nightmares every night."

Poising my tin coffee cup as if to heave it at him, I suddenly remembered something. I'd been the first one up—and the outside door had been standing open. Eagerly I brought him to task.

"Begging your humble pardon, I hate to mention it, but I found the door standing wide open this morning. In your haste to show Tommy what a dope he has for a big brother, you left the door open for all the

bears and wolves in the forest to enter and eat us alive in our beds."

Bill's face showed disbelief. "You're screwy. I made sure the door was latched."

"Sorry—it was wide open when I got up this morning."

Bill turned to Tommy. "You didn't get up before we did this morning, did you, Tommy?"

Tommy vigorously denied this accusation.

Shrugging, Bill passed it off. "Guess we'll have to fix the door, too."

Man like, we let the breakfast dishes set. I persuaded Bill the business of repairing the roof could be put off for the time being.

The woods was teeming with animal life. We fixed a couple of rude traps and could hardly pull Tommy away from them. He wanted to stick close by and watch the snares in operation, but we lured him on. Finding a beautiful little cave, we were soon frolicking in the water sans bathing trunks. The water was soft, velvety. After a lot of splashing on the part of Tommy, we stretched out to dry.

"This is the life!" Bill stretched out luxuriantly. "Wonder what the gang's doing now?" he mused.

"Envying you," I gave satisfactory reply.

Tommy popped out with: "I'm gonna tell Bobby and Jacky I went in swimming without any clothes at all. And I'm gonna tell Jimmy and Harold and Willis and Denny and. . . ."

"Hey there," I interrupted. "Sounds like you're going to tell all the world about it."

Purring contentedly, he wriggled into a more comfortable position.

Sure enough, on our way back to the lodge we discovered a rabbit in one snare. Taking it out, we fixed the snare up again.

"Fried rabbit!" Bill smacked his lips together.

Tommy put in his claim. "I get the tail. I'm gonna give it to Mamma for a powder puff."

The rabbit cleaned and Tommy in possession of its tail, Bill and I proceeded with the job of repairing the roof.

"No, you're not getting up on the roof," I was firm with Tommy. "You can gather up the shingles on the ground and hand them to us."

BILL from his perch on the roof, yelled down, "Go in the bedroom and bring out the shingles I took in last night."

Dutifully, Tommy streaked into the house.

I climbed to the rooftop, started pounding with my makeshift hammer.

"They aren't there." Tommy stood on the ground looking up at us.

"Did you bring them out this morning?" Bill turned to me.

"I didn't touch 'em," I replied, then called down to Tommy, "are you sure you didn't do something with them?"

He shook his head.

"You didn't use them for kindling wood this morning and forget about it?" I asked Bill sarcastically.

He frowned. "Come to think of it, I don't recollect seeing them when I got up. . . ."

Pursing my lips together, I admitted, "Neither do I." Then added impatiently, "Someone's crazy around here—but it isn't me." Bill let go with a shingle.

I looked down again for Tommy but he was gone.

"He's probably trying to play some sort of joke on us . . . let it go," Bill said soothingly.

"Why get upset?" I asked myself. "Bill's right—the kid's trying to get my goat." But I relieved my pent-up emotion by hammering fast and furiously.

"Louie . . .! Louie . . .!" Tommy had reappeared below and was calling my name insistently.

I stopped hammering. "Yes?"

"The man says for you to stop shingling." Tommy was looking up, wide-eyed and innocent.

Usually I could tell when he indulged in fairy tales or pranks. He couldn't keep a certain tell-tale twinkle from his eye. But now his entire mien was serious.

"What man?" asked Bill.

"The man in the bedroom," returned Tommy.

"Oh—so now there's a man in the bedroom?" Bill leaned over the edge of the roof. "And what's the man doing in the bedroom?"

"Sleeping."

"Did you hear that?" Bill turned his head

toward me. "There's a man sleeping in our bedroom."

"Oh, he isn't in our bedroom," protested Tommy.

Bill's eyebrows raised. "No?"

"No . . . he's in the bedroom in the back."

"And just what were you doing in the back bedroom?" I asked rather harshly.

TOMMY looked somewhat hurt at the sharpness of my voice. "I was looking for the shingles. He's a very nice man. I showed him my rabbit's tail and he said he gave one just like it to his mother when he was a little boy . . . and she liked it very much." He looked up appealingly. "Do you think Mama will *really* like it?"

"Listen, young man," I said truculently. "No one's going to like *you* if you persist in making up tall tales like this man in the bedroom." I began hammering again.

Bill, realizing Tommy was getting my goat, grinned and called out: "What's the man's name, Tommy?"

"I didn't ask him—but I will," replied Tommy soberly. He turned to enter the lodge.

"Just a minute—I'll go along." Bill slid down the roof and made the short jump to the ground.

"I'll go along, too," I said casually and followed them through the lodge into the back bedroom.

It was empty.

Tommy looked about, surprised.

He was a good little actor, I thought, as he walked over to the dust-covered bed, then turned to face us.

"He *was* here . . . truly he was—cross my heart and hope to die." He went through the motions of making the cross.

"And he said for us to stop shingling," repeated Bill.

"Uh-huh. He said shingling this lodge was his job and no one else could do it." Tommy looked us squarely in the eyes. "You don't believe me, but that's what he told me. He said nobody else could shingle . . . he'd only have to tear the shingles off and do it over again." He drew a deep breath, then continued. "He said if I was a good boy and got you to stop hammering so he could go to sleep again, he'd let me help him shingle some night." He added forlornly, "I guess he couldn't sleep."

I clamped my teeth together, but Bill burst out laughing. "Looks like we've got the makings of a writer in the family, eh, Louie? Tommy can write 'em and you can read 'em."

But I didn't think it at all funny.

"What'll we call your friend, Tommy?" Bill led the way back into the living room.

"He's The Shingler," replied Tommy matter-of-factly.

"That's good—or The Shingling Ghost," was Bill's suggestion.

I added sarcastically: "Or The Ghost Who Shingles At Night."

Gaily we set off on another fishing expedition. But secretly I was having qualms about nightfall.

TOMMY had never been an overly-imaginative child, I mused as I lay on my cot that night. What had made him concoct such a wild story.

Or was it?

Anyway I had taken the precaution of rearranging the cots. Turning slightly I could see Tommy, sleeping peacefully on his cot placed between mine and Bill's.

Bill's breathing was deep, interspersed by an occasional light snoring sound.

But I couldn't sleep.

Leaning over the edge of my cot, I fumbled for the flashlight I had carefully placed on the floor. Its beam on my watch indicated a quarter of twelve.

I lay waiting.

Waiting for what? I asked myself scornfully.

The night was chilly, but perspiration beaded my forehead. My ears strained for every sound.

Crickets chirping.

The rustle of the wind through the trees.

An owl policing the deep woods.

My throat was parched.

I wished we were home. Back in the city with its flashing neon lights and the rumble of the elevated.

Something was wrong with this place with its eerie atmosphere. Nothing you could actually lay a finger on. But it was there nevertheless.

Unable to stand it any longer, I kicked the covers down to the foot of the cot, then stood. A tremor ran through my entire frame. Picking my way carefully past the other two cots. I made my way to the living room, leaving the door between the living room and bedroom ajar.

A faint glow came from the fireplace.

I had undressed in the living room and my clothes were hanging over the back of the chair where I had left them. I slipped into my pants, drew on a lumberjacket, then headed for the kitchen where I practically drained the tin bucket of well water we had brought in from the outside pump.

Why I did it I don't know, but I stood by the door of the back bedroom, listening. On a sudden impulse my hand reached out and turned the knob.

Only shadows.

Big shadows . . . small shadows . . . fat shadows . . . thin shadows.

But that was all.

Back in the living room I tested the outside door.

Satisfied, I stretched out in front of the fireplace, using Bill's jacket for a pillow. Drawing a deep breath, I closed my eyes and began counting . . . mumbling to myself. . . .

"One shingle . . . two shingles . . . three shingles. . . ."

One hundred fifty-four shingles and I was out.

But no sooner had I entered that limbo known as Slumberland than I was wide awake again, sitting bolt upright.

It had started.

Someone was up on that roof—shingling!

THERE was the rhythmic tap-tap at the hammer.

Then came a rending sound like a shingle being torn loose from the roof and ending with a dull thud as it landed on the ground.

What was that Tommy had said about his Shingling Ghost? Shingling this lodge was *his* job and nobody else could do it—he'd only have to tear the shingles off and do it over again!

And it sounded exactly like that was what the puckish fellow was up to now.

This was no job of the wind. No figment of the imagination.

Someone WAS up there—busily shingling the roof in the dead of night.

And to make matters worse—*the outside door was now standing wide open!*

Like a flash I was on my feet, armed only with a thick ugly stick of wood.

"Better get Bill," something whispered inside me.

Keeping a cautious eye on that open door, I stepped to the bedroom door, called softly. "Bill. . . ."

Then I froze as my glance extended beyond Bill's cot to the one in the center.

EMPTY!

Tommy's cot was empty!

Roughly I shook Bill by the shoulder.

Rolling over, he opened one eye and muttered: "Nightmares . . . Louie's having another nightmare. . . ."

This time I shook him so hard his teeth chattered.

"Bill—Tommy's missing . . . and the front door's open. . . ."

He was on his feet in an instant. "The back bedroom!"

Armed with the stick of wood in one hand, flashlight in the other, we raced for the back bedroom.

The tapping noise had stopped but now Bill, too, heard the sound of shingles being ripped from the roof then tossed to the ground.

Stopping dead still, he cocked his head to one side and listened, frowning.

"You're right!" he exclaimed. "There *is* someone on that roof."

The back bedroom revealed only Tommy's rabbit tail, laying on the foot of the bed as if dropped there hurriedly.

I didn't like it. "Outside," I said to Bill.

As we neared the door the hammering sound started up again.

Cautiously we crept out into the night.

The lodge was L-shaped and from where we stood, a shadowy figure was visible on the roof.

"Tommy!"

He was standing as if listening to someone—standing dangerously near the edge of the roof.

I started forward, but Bill placed a restraining arm in front of me. "Don't startle him," he hissed. "He might fall off."

I nodded silently and we padded forward on the soft cushiony grass.

Our eyes glued to that rooftop. The hammering continued. But it was not Tommy who wielded the hammer.

I blinked, screwed my eyes up tight then opened them wide.

Everything within me strained to see the other person on the roof. But there was no one.

The hammering stopped. Then came the rending noise.

Tommy took a step nearer the edge of the roof, stooped down. I held my breath. One more step and he would come hurtling from the rooftop to the ground.

He rose from his stooping position, turned, and let the shingle he had picked up fall to the ground. It landed within a few feet of Bill and me. Tommy said something, smiled.

"Good God," whispered Bill hoarsely. "What is it? Something's got to be up there. Tommy could never have climbed up there by himself."

He uttered my very thoughts. Tommy took a step back and I heaved an inward sigh of relief. Then suddenly his body jerked and he slid forward.

My heart almost stopped beating. It was as if an unseen hand had reached out and shoved Tommy.

EVERY nerve in my body tingled.

I heard Bill gasp in horror.

In that same split second we both rushed forward to try to receive that tiny body before it hit the ground. I braced myself, arms ready.

My lips moved in silent prayer. The roof was higher at this point. A fall from this height could result only in tragedy.

It seemed I stood there an eternity—then mercifully Tommy's lean young body landed squarely in my arms with such force that I fell back onto the soft springy grass.

Tommy began to cry. I didn't blame him. I felt like crying too. Bill rushed over to us, helped me to my feet. I was still clutching Tommy in my arms.

"Let's get out of here," Bill cried out.

Then began the barrage that was to haunt us all.

Shingles began flying from the roof —all aimed straight for us. One hit me on the forehead and I felt a trickle of blood run down the side of my face.

A hammer came hurtling through the air, barely missing Tommy's head.

Shingles. . . . Nothing but flying shingles.

Bill cried out as one crashed against his skull.

"The car!" I thrust the keys at him. "Start the car!"

Catching the keys, Bill turned and sprinted towards the old jalopy parked a short distance from the lodge.

I followed but Tommy's weight slowed me down a bit.

The shingles kept coming. Now and then one found its target and stung like fire.

Bill had the jalopy tuned up, waiting.

Hastily, I dumped the sobbing boy into the seat. "Get her going," I yelled to Bill. Clinging to the side of the car, my feet planted firmly on the running board, I looked back to see the brick chimney shatter and crumple as though from a mighty blow.

"Faster," I urged Bill as a brick sped like lightning through the air, striking the rear of the car.

That mad shingling ghost was hurling everything in sight at us.

Fortunately, however, the distance we had now covered was sufficient so that this new barrage could do no damage.

I heaved a sigh of relief when the main highway came into sight.

IT WAS morning when we reached the city. The hands on the big clock on the tower pointed to eight-thirty.

My fright was now gone; in its place, a cold anger.

"Turn here," I instructed Bill tersely. "I want to stop off at the office."

"Yeah," Bill replied. "I'd like to say a thing or two to that boss of yours."

An auto horn beeped.

Tommy stirred, sat up suddenly.

"It's all right," I reassured him and wiped his tear-stained face with my handkerchief. "We'll soon be home."

Mr. Cabot was in his office already dictating to his secretary. He jumped up when we barged in, dismissed the secretary.

"What happened, boys? What are you doing back so soon?"

"Mr. Cabot, *you* know what happened. But why did you send *us* there?"

Mr. Cabot mopped his forehead, poured a glass of water from a carafe on his desk and gulped it down.

"You're all right?" he asked anxiously.

"We're all right *now*—but Tommy came pretty close to being killed."

Anxiety creased Mr. Cabot's features. "Tell me what happened."

Briefly I sketched the previous night's adventures.

He kept nodding from time to time. When I finished he turned to Tommy, started asking questions.

Tommy, realizing the danger was over, began to enjoy his position in the spotlight. Yes, he *had* actually seen an old man. The man had been asleep in the back bedroom the first time Tommy had seen him. He said he liked Tommy and wished Tommy would stay at the lodge to keep him company.

Then the next night the old man had come into our bedroom, wakened Tommy and told him he could help shingle the roof.

Tommy hadn't been at all afraid. The old man had been so very nice. Everybody had a job, explained the old man. His particular task was to shingle the lodge roof. So every night after midnight he nailed down so many shingles—tore loose so many for work the next night.

It was beginning to be rather lonesome up there night after night all by himself. Tommy was such a nice little boy.

And he had thought out a way so that Tommy could remain there with him. Such a simple, easy way.

Then he had pushed Tommy off the roof.

Mr. Cabot stopped his pacing. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. He asked Tommy one more question.

"Did the old man tell you his name?"

Without hesitation Tommy replied: "Sylvester Whiteneck."

All color drained from Mr. Cabot's face and he sagged back against the desk for support.

"Boys," he said, "Sylvester Whiteneck was my wife's grandfather . . . forty-five years ago while shingling the roof of the lodge Sylvester Whiteneck fell from that roof—dead.

***Coming in the next* WEIRD TALES**

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For Love of a Phantom

Must ghosts always, always be grim, terrible, revengeful creatures?

THERE were five of us in all, old friends who convened regularly at the "Bachelors' Club"; and we had been discussing the subject of ghosts. I do not know what led us into this theme, unless it were the uncanny, blustery autumn night; yet four of us had had our stories to tell—the usual harrowing, incredible tales of weird sounds heard near graveyards, of midnight prowlers, haunted houses, and invisible hands and presences. All the while the flames in the great fireplace, burning to red embers, lent emphasis to our mood by the fitful shadows they cast across the room.

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

The fifth of the group, speechless in a corner, listened to our tales with a steady, faintly whimsical smile. In his blue, vaguely dreamy eyes there was an enigmatical light; and in his very silence there was something that irritated and provoked us.

"What's the matter, Evanson?" I finally asked. "Maybe you don't like our childish drivelings?"

Evanson's smile broadened into one of hearty good humor. "No, it's not that I'd call them drivelings. It's that I was thinking of another kind of ghost story entirely."

It seemed to us that the smile was drowned in a fugitive sadness, before he offered to explain, "You see, I can't quite put myself into the mood of those ghosts of yours—grim, terrible, revengeful creatures. Ghosts, in my experience, have been kindly and lovable."

"*Your* experience?"

Again that sad light flickered and faded. "Yes, in my experience. You'll think I'm crazy—sometimes, when I remember it, I'm inclined to think so myself—and yet I did once meet a ghost that wasn't at all of the hair-raising variety. At least, not after I got to know her. The adventure was the strangest and most precious of my life."

"Out with it!" we all urged.

HIS manner was serious, almost solemn as he leaned forward, chin propped upon palm, and slowly commenced, "It's something I rarely speak of, yet was as real as this room we're sitting in. It all happened about fifteen years ago, when I was still a youngster. I had just left my small-town home in Iowa, and had come East to look for work in the city, and was still jobless and desperate when the big event occurred.

As my pocketbook wouldn't allow much, I had taken a room in the oldest, dingiest part of town. I can remember that room as if I lived there yet—a musty, six-by-eight little box, with high ceiling, and torn greenish-brown wallpaper where unearthly shadows seemed to dance whenever I turned on the gas-light. Yet that room knew some of the saddest and most exalted moments of my life. For it was there that I met Vera."

"Vera?" someone echoed.

The speaker paused long enough to sigh reminiscently.

"Vera is the name I gave her. I was never to hear any word from her lips. Had she really any name? I do not know. From first to last, she was like some mysterious superhuman essence. But let me get on with my story. Even before we met, I suspected her presence—or, rather, I suspected the presence of something queer and unaccountable. I'm sure it was not my imagination, for I've never been subject to what you'd call attacks of nerves; but I couldn't help being upset sometimes at night when I would hear an odd rustling as of a skirt swishing, or a creaking as of someone entering lightly. Of course, I tried to reason that it was only a mouse burrowing in the closet, or else the sagging timbers of the old house; but, at the same time, a creepy sensation would go shivering down my spine, and there were moments when I leapt up in dread, with the sense that something weird and invisible was standing at my elbow, or leaning over my bed, or entering at the door or through the walls. Like most people, I had always laughed at yarns of haunted houses; now, however, I can tell you I was not ready to laugh, but often went up to my room trembling, and with a cold perspiration coming out on my face. If I could have afforded lodgings elsewhere, I would have moved in a hurry.

"Yet my first meeting with Vera didn't occur during any of those spells of chicken-heartedness. One November evening—very much like tonight it was, with the wind a roaring tempest, and the dead leaves dancing amid flurries of snow—I had been roaming the city dejectedly. Try to picture my mood: all that day, and all the day before, and all the day before that, I hadn't spoken with a soul, except to ask for work and hear a merciless 'Nothing doing!' snapped in reply. Not one friendly voice or face had greeted me. At last, feeling like a homeless puppy, I returned to my room, shivering, drooping in despair. I didn't notice anything uncanny, and didn't hear or feel anything unusual as I flung myself down upon my couch and buried my face in my hands.

"It is hard to say what impulse urged me to look up almost immediately. But I did

look up—and what I saw made me gape and stare. I was not frightened—no, I was not, though more startled than ever before in my life. In the opposite corner, beside the door among the shadows only half dispersed by the gas-light, stood the figure of a woman!

"Or rather—and this was the remarkable thing—there stood the upper half of a woman, her face and bust perfectly outlined, but the lower half of her seeming to melt into a mist. Even her upper members had a filmy, intangible quality, as though she had been made out of some faintly luminous vapor. She was someone I did not remember having seen before—a girl of nineteen or twenty, with the most wistful, piquant look I had ever observed; her features were small and exquisitely proportioned, and when they smiled it was as if all heaven had opened up. You'll think me the victim of some poetical frenzy if I attempt to describe her smile, which had such a flooding grace and radiance that I could have believed—yes, you'll laugh to hear it, for I am not a religious man—I could have believed some angelic presence stood before me.

"I suppose it was only a few seconds before the figure had faded back into the darkness, but those few seconds were packed with more impressions than whole days. Stunned as I was, I saw that she was something more than a mere hallucination—no, she was an actual individual, no less than I. From the first, I never doubted her reality. Even as I watched, she began to move; or, rather, to drift through the air, to glide toward me with a slow, effortless motion; and, at the same time, her expression altered slightly, her smile broadened and deepened, and was fixed upon me with a sorrowful and benignant look, as if she were somehow yearning toward me.

This impression was confirmed when her arms, emerging from the haze, were lifted toward me as though in pleading. While I stood staring at her dumbfounded, she gradually approached, until her form, venturing closer into the gas-light, seemed to become transparent, and suddenly vanished. But at the same instant—you'll say I was dreaming, but I know I was not—I felt a light touch as of a caress upon my cheek."

WITH a faint sigh, the speaker paused, and sat staring absently into the firelight, where the flames were dying amid a red glare; while, from without, the wailing and complaining of the wind was borne to us more dismally than ever.

"I simply don't know how to account for it," Evanson continued, "guess I must have a queer temperament, but from that moment I felt soothed and relieved. I did not feel forlorn or lonely any more; the earth had ceased to be an empty, uninviting place; it was as if I had caught glimpses of great unseen worlds of love and kindliness that lay all about me.

"What I did not understand was that my experience was only beginning. An hour later, after I had undressed and turned off the gas-light, I noticed a faintly luminous patch in the corner; and, after a second or two, that patch resolved itself into the same phantom shape. The same smile was upon the face, a smile of great kindliness and longing; and I thought that the girl nodded, almost as if to a friend. I did not tremble as she drew near, although my heart did leap and thump, and I can't tell you what an exultation was within me, something that—yes, let me admit it—something that was mighty close to dawning love.

"Standing there in the darkness close to my cot, the woman of mist drew to within a foot of me. I saw her arms reach out, her hands upraised as though to take mine, while in her eyes there was such a yearning brightness that I could have believed her tears of joy to be flowing across actual lids. On an impulse, my hands were flung out to take hers, so near to her that our fingertips might have touched—then, where she seemed to be, they felt nothing at all!

"Still smiling her heavenly smile, she faded back into the darkness.

"That night I saw her in a dream. But now her lips quivered into speech, and I felt her arms about my neck; and low words of love were in my ears and on my tongue, and I held her close, and whispered things such as I had never said to any girl before. And happiness surrounded me like a blessing, and my senses were held as in a magic spell—until all at once, like a vapor, like a vision, she passed from my arms, and

I awoke. I am not ashamed to confess that, as I stared out into the gray dawn, the teardrops were still hot upon my cheeks.

"BUT I was to see her again, and yet again and again. Nightly she would come to my room; sometimes for many minutes she would stand by my cot, staring at me with the same sweet yearning look; sometimes, when reading or writing, I would turn about in my chair, to find her hovering behind me; and sometimes she would be seated at my side, and would lift her hands as though to caress me. But never a word came from between her lips, although I, in a sort of new-found rapture, would hold out my arms, and murmur, 'Sweetheart! Sweetheart!' She, in response, would always smile, and I told myself she heard and understood.

"Strange as it will seem to you, I was coming to feel toward her more than ever toward any woman of flesh and blood. There wasn't one of the pangs, the exultations, the longings of love that I didn't experience—all things, except its sweet fulfillment! That dingy room in that dreary old house was coming to be home to me; I would rush back to it of evenings expectantly, awaiting my first sight of Vera; and if she did not appear at once, I would feel like one disappointed at a lovers' rendezvous; but when she did come, it would be as if a wind of joy had swept over me. And she too, I thought, took pleasure from those meetings, though they were fleshless as a meeting of wave and starbeam; the wistful, faintly melancholy look, which I had at first observed on her face, began to vanish; and in its place a contented expression appeared. We were happy—she, the shadow-woman, the airy nothing; I, the friendless, lonesome youth — though perhaps never had a stranger attachment been known. Do not tell me there is no ideal love! I knew it then, and was to know it during all those three enthralling, unearthly months. . . .

"Three months—that was all. Today it seems to me like a dream that could not have happened—yet it embraced a whole life within itself. Sooner or later, the end had to come—but it did come even earlier than need be. How many times I had returned to my room in trembling and fear, lest she be gone; and how many times, when the dear, familiar features had reappeared, I had been ready to cry out in wonder and thanksgiving! I could not have known that I myself was to take flight.

"By this time, I was adapting myself to the city; I had work, and prospects of advancement; and I would not have exchanged my dismal room for Aladdin's palace. Just the same, fate was to drive me out. One day there came word that my mother lay critically ill in our home-town many hundreds of miles away; my father's excited message urged my return post-haste. What a shock as I stared at the telegram! Of course, there was only one thing to do; and though I loved my mother and was pierced to the heart by the news, I was moved almost as much by the thought of leaving the city—and Vera. Just as if by some mysterious divination, I suspected that I would never see her again. 'Dearest,' I remember saying, among other mad things on our last evening together, 'dearest, I must be going. I am needed away from here. I will come back as soon as I can.'

"She nodded in a sort of melancholy resignation; and the old yearning wistful expression flitted once more across her face, and her arms were lifted toward me as if in pleading. As I took a last step toward her, with the impulse to embrace her as though she had been a breathing woman, she waved as if in farewell, and slowly began to fade, at first her breast and arms, then her neck and vague dark hair, then her face itself, until only the eyes were left, looking out at me caressingly, luminously, like a blessing and a reproach . . . before they too were lost amid the gas-lit shadows. An hour later, I had boarded the train for home."

THE speaker paused, and a long silence followed. The wind still screamed and sneered; the red embers in the fireplace waned unnoticed to a coaly black; but Evanson, still brooding, sat staring before him with dream-filled misty eyes.

"Ever see the girl again?" one of us finally asked.

Evanson shook his head, and resumed in lifeless tones, "My mother's illness was

slow and lingering. It was six months before I could revisit the city. Even then, I hastened back eagerly—yes, joyfully, hoping to return to my old lodgings. But I was to receive a great shock. The building where I had lived, antiquated barn that it was, had been torn down. Already a new edifice was rising in its place! And at the sight of this the thought swept over me once more, as clearly as if I could read the future, that I should never see Vera again. . . .

"And yet, despite that vivid premonition, I did hope to see her. I engaged quarters near at hand, and waited, waited. But she was never to come to me. And that, if you want to know it, explains one of the secrets of my life. It explains why I'm a single man today. I'm afraid that, subconsciously, I compare every girl I meet with Vera—and, somehow, the reality cannot match the phantom."

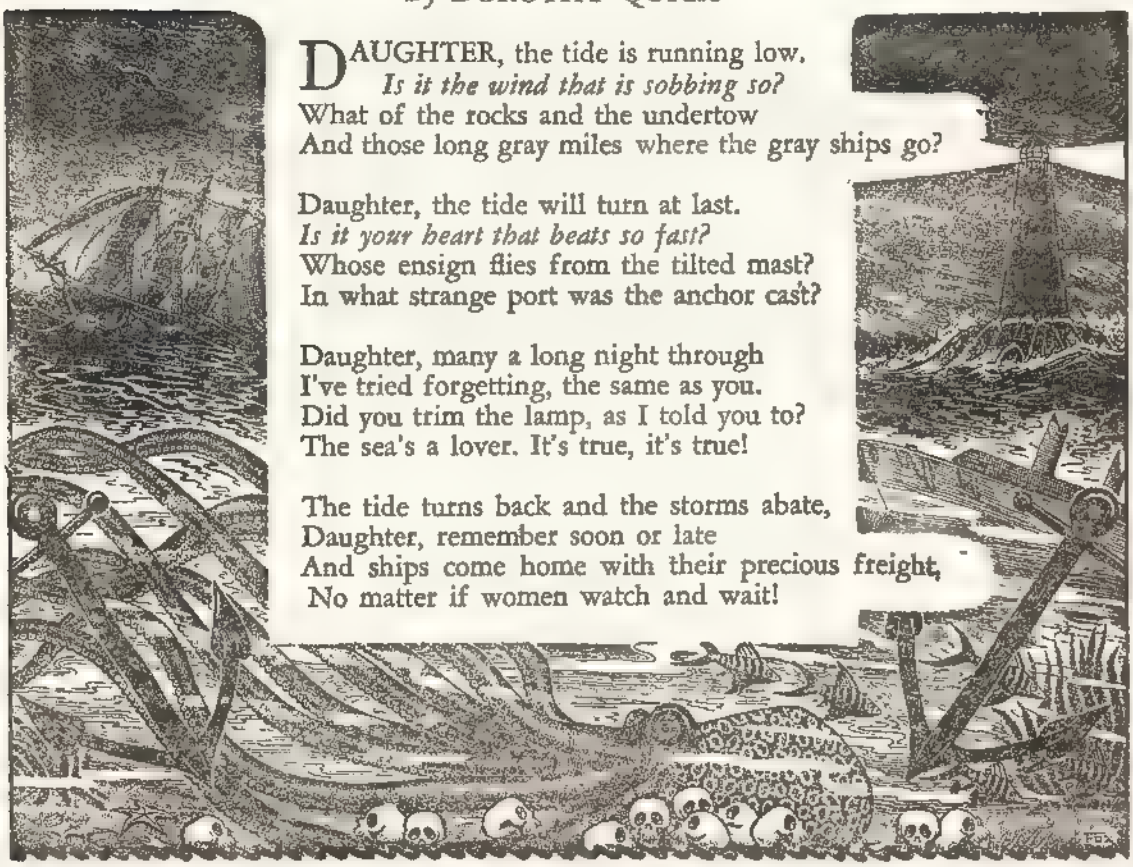
Another long silence intervened.

"After all," I said, while one of us started passing the glasses, "there is one point you haven't made plain. Who was Vera? Usually, in such cases—"

With a hasty wave of the hand, Evanson cut me short. "Yes, I did make investigations. A few months before my arrival, a girl of about nineteen—a young art student—occupied the room I had taken. They say she had been abandoned in love—and one day she was found dead, with all the chinks and crannies of the room stuffed up, and the gas escaping. Her photograph bears a remarkable resemblance to Vera."

Long Watch

By DOROTHY QUICK



DAUGHTER, the tide is running low.
Is it the wind that is sobbing so?
What of the rocks and the undertow
And those long gray miles where the gray ships go?

Daughter, the tide will turn at last.
Is it your heart that beats so fast?
Whose ensign flies from the tilted mast?
In what strange port was the anchor cast?

Daughter, many a long night through
I've tried forgetting, the same as you.
Did you trim the lamp, as I told you to?
The sea's a lover. It's true, it's true!

The tide turns back and the storms abate,
Daughter, remember soon or late
And ships come home with their precious freight,
No matter if women watch and wait!

Ghost

By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

Magic is for silly fools and old men—at least, that's the saying

AT FIRST, Couranos liked to remember how the old man died.

There was one shaded lamp in the room, on the table at his elbow. Its light shone up from the papers spread before him, throwing every seam in his withered face into high relief, as though it were carved out of yellowed bone. His eyes were shining highlights in the black hollows above his cheekbones, and his mouth was a lipless black line. The shadow of his hunched shoulders sprawled across the paneled wall behind his chair.

Couranos had come up through the

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

kitchen, and he had the bread knife in his left hand, pressed flat against his thigh where it would not show over the table. As he opened the door and smelt the musty odor of the old man's room, he felt a trickle of sweat starting down his side. His right hand was clenched over the little leather pouch which he carried in his coat pocket.

The old man looked up, and the shadows crawled over his yellow face in a grimace of satisfaction. He tilted the lampshade so that the light shone in Couranos' face, and the shadows behind the chair pushed forward to watch over his shoulder.

"You were to have been here Monday, Mr. Couranos," he said softly. "I don't like to wait, you know."

Couranos' throat was dry. He had to lick at his parched lips before he could speak. "You'll have to wait, Giannelli. I got no more money for you."

The hard specks of light in the old eyes did not move. "I am not at all happy to hear you speak like this, Mr. Couranos. There is a war—pay is good—surely you can find something to spare for me?"

Couranos had to clear his throat. "I'm through paying. This ain't the old country; this is the United States of America. They got no magic here." His own eyes narrowed for an instant, and his fingers dug hard into the little pouch his mother's sister had sent him from across the sea. "Anyway, I got friends who know about magic too. They know what to do for it."

"So?" The ivory fingers tightened ever so little on the papers, then pushed them carefully aside. The old man opened a drawer under the table and brought out a shapeless minikin of dirty wax, clothed in rags. He set it on the table under the lamp, bending the bandy legs a little so that it stood upright. Couranos felt the muscles of his own legs begin to tense, and the ache start in them. His fingers knotted around the little bag in his pocket, and the panic began to drain out of him again.

THE old man sounded tired. "Our little play is finished. Good." His spread palm came down on the crouching puppet and flattened it in a black smear of grease and rag. Couranos felt his heart leap, then drop back into its regular rhythm. This was a good charm the old witch had sent, good even after it had crossed water. He tried to spit on the floor to show his contempt, but his mouth was like cotton.

Couranos was standing close against the table, so close that its edge pressed across his thighs. Giannelli looked up from the blot of wax, studying his face. "We are 1944 up-to-date one hundred per cent New York United States Americans now, it seems. Magic is for foreigners. Magic is tricks for silly fools and old men like Giannelli. Even an old man knows sometimes more than one trick, Mr. Couranos."

The fear began to seep back into Couranos' stomach. His hand tightened on the handle of the knife. "What you talking about, Giannelli? What tricks?"

The old man wove his bony fingers together and began to tug at the knuckles. "We are up-to-date men, Mr. Couranos—you and I," he said. "We will be modern and do business like the Chamber of Commerce or the First National Bank. That is the way for men like us." He leaned forward over the light and his voice was like sharp steel. "The government of this up-to-date Chamber of Commerce country does not like people who come to it by the back door or the open window, Mr. Couranos. I think it will like to know about the way in which you came—and when, and why. I think there are a great many things which it will be glad to know. I think it may even want to pay a little something for such interesting information—not so much, perhaps, but an old man like me does not need so much. Unless, of course, there is some friend of your acquaintance who would like to reason with me. . . ."

Inside Stephen Couranos' body a steel spring broke with the twang of a cut harpstring. He came up on his toes, his thighs hard against the table top, leaning a little forward, and the knife licked out under the light and bit into the old man's body just under the inverted V of his breastbone, where a thick gold watch chain sagged across his vest. The blade slid into the old flesh as though it were sawdust. Couranos felt it grate against the spinal bones, then its point chugged solidly into the oak back of the chair and stuck there. He stood for a moment leaning across the table, his whole

weight on the hilt of the knife; then he rocked back on his heels and stepped away. There was no blood on his fingers, which surprised him a little, but his palms were slimy with sweat and he stood scrubbing them slowly up and down along his thighs as he stared at the old man.

The lamp shade had swung around and the light shone up into the sneering yellow face, and made the shadows that clumped behind it black and heavy. The old man's skinny body was pinned upright against the chair, so that he looked very tall, and the evil black eyes were still open, staring straight into his face under heavy lids. He waited for the face to change, for the slitted eyes to close, for the old body to slump forward against the knife, but all that happened was that after a minute or two something began to drip slowly, like thick syrup, from the end of the knife-handle.

AT FIRST Couranos liked to remember how it happened. It never crossed his mind in the daytime, but when the day was over and he was back in his room, he liked to light a cigarette and lie back on the bed with his ankles crossed, looking at the blank wall. It wasn't dreaming, what he saw—it was more like remembering, for after a little while, maybe two or three minutes, maybe even ten or fifteen, he would begin to see the old man sitting there in the shadows, just like he had been when Couranos came into the room; and then it would all be acted out there on the wall like on a movie screen, only the sounds would be in his head, very low and quiet so that no one else would hear them. He would lie back against the pillow with his eyes partly closed and watch it all happen again, just as it had been that night, until the old man's blood began to drip slowly from the handle of the kitchen knife that pinned him up against the back of the big chair. Then he would stub out his cigarette and go to sleep.

Even after he had seen it twenty, thirty, fifty times, every night just the same, just as it had been, Couranos liked to watch it happen. When it was over he would wipe his palms down on the blanket as if he were wiping off the feel of something filthy. That was the way Giannelli had made him feel—ugly, and slimy, and evil-black like his filthy black magic. Couranos still wore the amulet his aunt had sent him from Greece on a string around his neck, under his shirt, against the skin. At first he had been glad to pay the old man a little every week, because he knew from talking to other men what happened when Giannelli got a clip of your hair from the barber or a rag of cloth from one of your shirts, and made one of his little dolls with your soul inside it. Then he began to ask for more—and more and more—and when there was no other way he had written a letter to the aunt who was his mother's half sister, and who had a name for being a witch. She had sent him the little pouch, all across the seas, although some people said that magic which has crossed water will lose its power. It had protected him against the evil magic of the old man's little doll—though when you came right down to it, it was the knife that really did the trick. That he had used himself, for himself, and he liked to remember it.

AFTER a while Couranos found that he could make the picture of the old man's dying stand still, or run backward like a film in reverse, so that he could savor every detail of it over and over. He could lie and hold it with his mind as though it were a painted picture, studying every line of age and evil in the old man's face. There should have been terror in it—terror and surprise—but there never was. There was nothing—nothing except a kind of sardonic, hateful amusement that glittered in the slitted old eyes.

After a few months he knew every detail of the picture, but somehow he never wearied of it. There was satisfaction in the fact that it didn't change, that it was done and over and written down in the books of the gods for all time and forever. Then one night, as he began to drift off into sleep, a memory—no more than an impression—slipped into his mind, that something *had* been different. He lay staring at the ceiling, trying to remember. He tried to make the picture again, though he knew that it would never come twice in one night. The next night and the next he studied it, trying to pick out the thing that had changed. Nearly a week passed before he found it.

The room where the old man died was full of shadows, crowding into the corners, running along the paneled walls, filling the place thigh-deep like black fog. They crowded in close to his shoulder, jowl to jowl with him, watching everything he did. And in the instant when Couranos drove the knife hard into the hollow under the old man's ribs, a shadow moved.

It was a bare flicker of motion, caught in the corner of his eye, as if something had darted out to catch at his hand, and then withdrawn. It was a motion of shadow against shadow, darkness in darkness, without shape, yet as Couranos studied it, it seemed that he could almost sense an outline that separated something black and formless out of the deeper blackness in which it lurked.

He had always lain with his eyes open, smoking a last cigarette, letting the picture grow against the darkness at the foot of his bed, then taking control of it. Now it was different. He closed his eyes and found that it grew against the blackness of their lids. Night by night it seemed to grow clearer and more definite, as though it were moving out of the shrouding shadows behind the old man's shoulder into the full light of the single lamp, and he was sure now that each night the satisfaction and grim laughter which glinted in the old man's eyes was stronger and more mocking.

Couranos had lived in the same room for four out of the five years he had been in the city, and he knew it as he knew the picture of the old man's death. The wall beyond the foot of the bed was blank, papered with a faded flower pattern. The ceiling light shone full on it, and there was nothing in between, yet one evening as he came into the room it seemed that something moved against the baseboard. He crossed the floor and peered down at it, but there was nothing there—then as he turned his head it flickered again at the periphery of his vision. Slowly, trying to look past instead of directly at it, he turned back, and this time it was there—a blotch of shadow, the size of a small dog, lying at the base of the wall.

That night he moved his bed and screwed a brighter bulb into the ceiling fixture. Now the bed faced the window, with light from the hotel sign across the street beating into his face, yet as he lay back against the pillow the shadows of the old man's paneled room seemed to swell up out of the corners and cover the window, blotting it out, and then out of them emerged the disc of light from the lamp, and Giannelli's ivory hands, and his evil old face. This time the shadow stood close beside his shoulder, thick and black so that the wall behind it was concealed. It was crouched, poised, watching its chance—and when morning came, Couranos saw that the shadow on the wall had moved with the picture and was crouching under the window, like a small black lamb.

Stephen Couranos had a good business in this city where he had finally come to spend his final years. He had been many things since he had come into this country of opportunity—sponge diver, fisherman, peddler—but the corner newsstand was the best of all. Some of the people who bought his papers were important, the kind who got into the headlines or the pictures themselves sometimes, and he liked it that they knew him to call by name. He made a little money with the numbers, a little out of lottery tickets, a dollar now and then placing bets for the clerks and insurance salesmen who waited for their buses at his corner.

THEN one morning there was a sign scrawled on the wrapping of the bundle of papers on the sidewalk in front of his stand. He knew what it meant; in the old country people knew about such things. He waited: one night when he got home there was a piece gone from the shirt the laundry had brought back; a few days later the barber whom he usually visited mentioned, as if casually, that an old woman had come into the shop after he had left, and snatched up a snip of Couranos' hair. That was when Couranos went to see Giannelli, and Giannelli had shown him the little doll, and squeezed it in his long yellow fingers until Couranos thought that the heart would burst in his breast.

He paid, at first until the old man grew greedier; then he sent the letter to his mother's sister in the old country. And at last he had gone to the old man's room with the knife . . .

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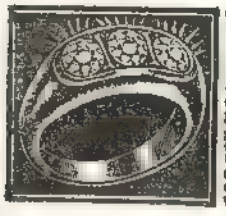
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Day by day the shadow under the wall of his room grew larger and more definite. He could see it now without having to watch for it out of the corner of his eye. Night by night the shadow in the picture grew more solid and moved out more from its background. He moved to another room; the picture followed, and the shadow went with the picture. Giannelli had had friends, and the thought had long since occurred to him that they might be using some of the old man's own black tricks against him now—sending these visions, making shadows where none should be. One night he left his stand and took the first train that came into the station. In a bigger city he would be harder to find.

As he opened the door of the room he had found, tucked away on a back street, the shadow was there—not quite as tall as a man yet, but broader and blunter and without any particular shape that he could describe in words. In the back of his mind he knew that it had a shape, if he could only see it.

Couranos knew now that a night would come when the shadowy shape behind the old man's chair would no longer miss, when the shape against the wall would no longer be vague, when its pounce at his wrist would thrust the knife aside and pin him down for its own or for the old man's pleasures. As its bulk and outline grew blacker and stronger against the shadows of the dream-room, and as its day-shape grew blacker and stronger against his wall, he found himself counting the nights until that time would come—that he was deciding, in his own mind, just how its shape would change with each passing night, and finding his prediction right.

As the nights passed, he held the picture before him for minute after minute, struggling to pierce the blackness at the old man's shoulder, to know what to expect, and be warned a little before the end. And what he could make out brought the sweat out on his whole body in icy little beads of dread.

The last day was Friday. As the morning drew on, he found the heat draining out of his flesh, felt his palms growing slippery with fear and his lips dry. He clung to each second of the day as he had once clung

to the grim satisfaction of the picture of death, but they were whisked out of his straining fingers, taking the hours with them. The shadows of the buildings opposite the restaurant where he had found a waiter's job, sidled across the pavement and lengthened as the afternoon wore on, until the great shadow of the world itself came up over the edge of the planet and it was night.

Perversely, the night dragged as the day had refused to do, spinning out the seconds into minutes and the minutes into an eternity. It seemed to Couranos that he had now lost all power over his own body; that it moved without volition, following its accustomed habits of work, while his mind crouched shivering behind his eyes, waiting for what would come to it when the work was done. Yet, when it was over and he had put on his coat and hat and was following the clack-clack of his heels through the streets of the sleeping city, he was clinging desperately to one last thread of hope, holding open one last doorway of escape from the thing that was hounding him.

He closed the door and locked it; that was the pattern of every night. He went to the bed and stood beside it, looking over the foot at the wall beside the dresser. The shadow was there, hunched down, turned toward him so that it stood out a little from the wall, and had thickness and body. It was waiting for him to lie down, waiting for the picture—the last picture—to begin. Then it would leave the corner where it crouched and come out into the room. Then in the dream it would come out from behind Giannelli's shoulder, and stare at him across the table—lean toward him . . .

He sat down on the edge of the bed without taking off his coat or hat. He swung his feet up on the coverlet and let his shoulders sag back against the pillow. As the touched it, the picture began to form, just beyond the foot of the bed, faster than it had ever come before. He could no longer control it; it moved on at its own speed hungrily, eagerly, impatient to reach the end. He felt the edge of the table pressing against his taut thighs; he saw the shadow gathering at Giannelli's shoulder; and before it could move he had driven the knife deep under the V of his own breastbone, so

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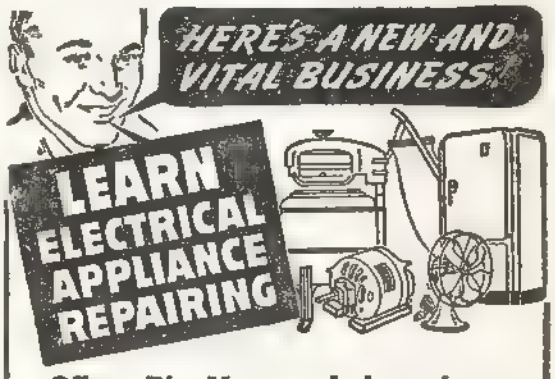

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that it glanced sickeningly against the bones of his spine and chunked into the mattress under his back . . .

STEPHEN COURANOS felt the last chill of fear drain out of his body and his mind, and leave them both empty. The picture was gone. There was nothing but darkness in the shadows which gathered against the wall beyond the foot of his bed. He had found the one escape from Giannelli's sending—flight into the emptiness of death.

Stephen Couranos began to go down into a blackness that surged around him like the tide of an endless sea, touched with phosphorescence that lined each wave with light. The light merged and melted into a gray mist which was clotting into the form of a bleak gray plain, bare and rocky, stretching without limit into the past and the future and limitless through all the present.

He, Stephen Couranos, stood naked in that gray land, feeling its cold seep into his bones. He began to walk, aimlessly, knowing nothing and caring nothing for where he went, and the gray plain and the fog and the universe drifted past him like the tide of a gray sea, in which he floated alone, naked in the cold of death.

Out of the mists a gray shape moved toward him soundlessly. It was a naked man, gaunt and shrunken so that the shapes of his bones showed through his translucent skin. His eyes were bright points in the hollow sockets of a skull, and his lips were shrunken back over a skull's sharp teeth. He saw Couranos, and eyed him beadily, tittering, then veered away and was gone into the mist.

Presently another of the things appeared, a woman-thing who sobbed and tittered like the first with a horrid excitement which showed in the way her death's-head with its stringy wisps of hair was thrust forward, and her tongue protruding from between her grinning lips. He turned and followed her.

SOON they were all around him, hurrying through the gray wrack, mewing and tittering to themselves as they ran. A gnawing hunger was beginning to suck at his own belly, and he hurried after them

through the gray mist, over the gray plain. His own lips writhed back in their grimace of anticipation, and he tittered nervously.

They were crowded together on the plain in a milling, drifting throng through which he was able to push himself as through a field of growing wheat, stronger—newer—than they. Something in him knew why they had come here, what it was they sought—what he sought with them. As he pressed forward, the gnawing in his body grew and he began to pant and whimper with eagerness like a hound closing in on its quarry.

The last gray shape whirled out of his way, and he fell on his knees beside a black stain that sprawled over the gray rock, a pool of liquid shadow from which rose a steaming warmth, good to his chilled bones. A man-thing crouched on all fours beside him like a hungry beast, lapping at the pool like a great gaunt cat. A woman-shape lapped thirstily beyond him. They were pushed aside and others of the gray folk flung themselves savagely at the pool and began their bestial lapping. Skeleton fingers clawed at his back and voices whimpered behind him, trying to get past.

Who he was, who he had been, everything was dissolved now in the tearing hunger which burned in every vein of his body and in the marrow of his bones. The scent of the steaming ichor swirled through his brain, blinding him with ravening desire. He went down on all fours on the ground, the hot fumes rising around him as he thrust his face forward—then across the pool two sardonic slitted eyes found him, and he crouched back on his naked haunches like a cornered beast.

He saw the gray shape of the old man rising from the hot pool of his own spilled blood, its thin lips smeared and dripping He saw the crowding ghosts swirl back in panic, and saw behind the old man's shoulder the black shape of the thing from which he had fled into death. And he began to run, sobbing and twittering, over the gray desert of eternity with the cold breath of the hunting blackness on his naked back.

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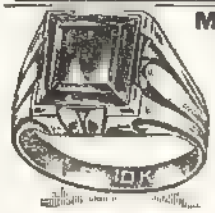

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Shoo, Shoo, Shonokins!

HERE is what Manly Wade Wellman has to say about the Shonokins in general and the infamous Shonokins of "Shonokin Town" in particular. These not quite human beings pose a problem even to the resourceful Thunstone and we suspect that he was not too reluctant to have the reinforcing influence of Crash Collins—as explained below—in this latest adventure.

That I couldn't have made up the Shonokins wholemeal from my imagination is proven, I think, from the letters I get now and again telling me things about them—readers of Thunstone's adventures say enthusiastically that they've heard about Shonokins for years and are glad to see that something is being done about them.

It is idle to locate the town of Araby more definitely than in the accompanying account, for Araby does not exist any longer, and has left practically no trace of its being. Yet there is a John Thunstone, as scores of people will tell you, and there most definitely is a Kent (Crash) Collins. If anybody doubts the existence of Crash, he may be found at the naval air station at Norfolk, Virginia, complete even to the tattooed "Crash" on his arm. In my files are letters from him, including his written permission to tell this story about him. Who knows? He may bob up again.

He and Thunstone both are puzzled about the seeming non-existence of female Shonokins. Yet it may be suggested that the mere absence of record of this much-needed gender in that race does not make them

necessarily non-existent. Perhaps the male Shonokins keep their mates undercover. Has anybody a clue or a theory? Thunstone would like to hear of it.

Manly Wade Wellman

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Gene Christensen, 16544 Akron St., Pacific Palisades, California
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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

READERS' VOTE

SHONOKIN TOWN	I'LL BE GLAD WHEN I'M DEAD
CATSPAWS	THE CINNABAR REDHEAD
THE NIGHT	THE SHINGLER
THE WINGS	FOR LOVE OF A PHANTOM
THE MAN WHO TOLD THE TRUTH	GHOST

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and send it to us.

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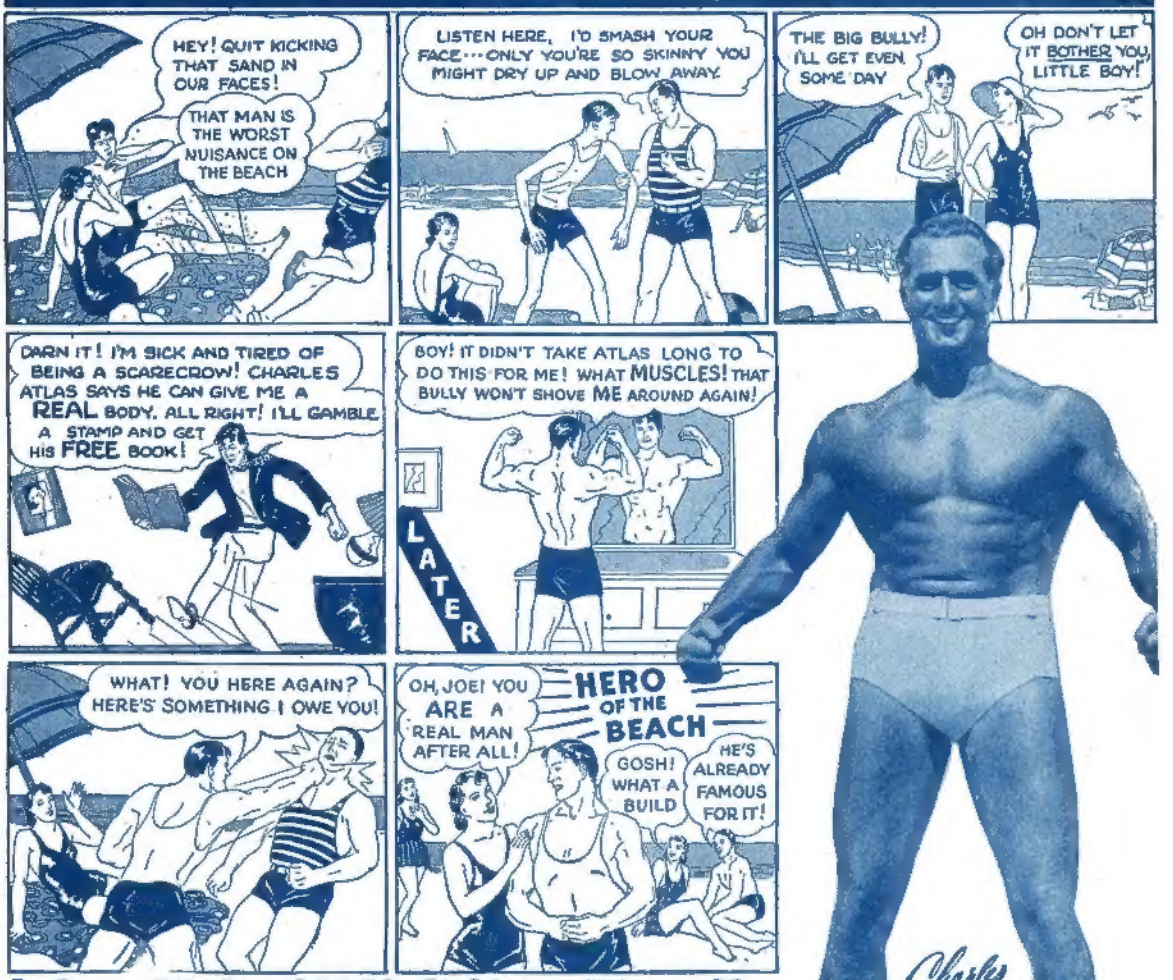

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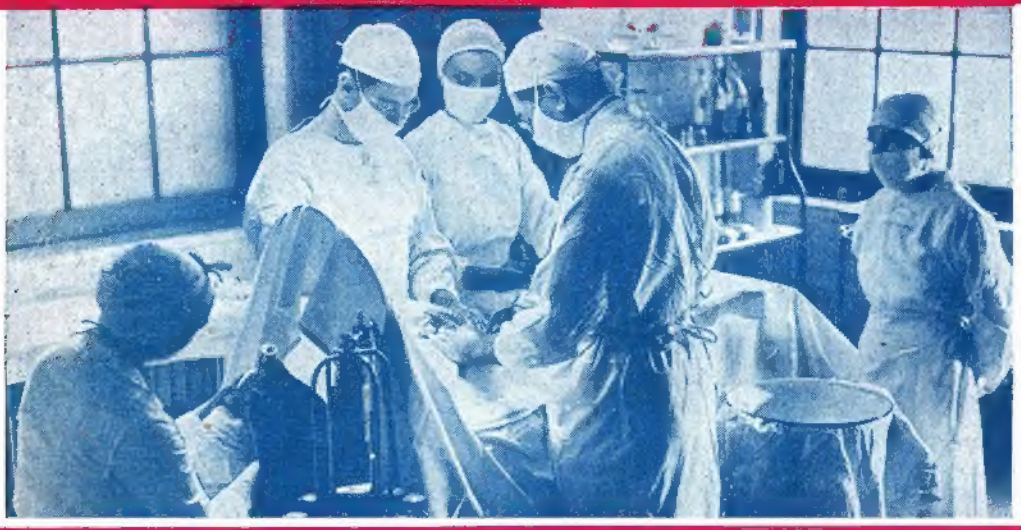

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